Title: Redefining Borders: Exploring Narrative Stance, Intertextuality, Ideology and Reader Positioning in Radical Crossover Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The huge popularity of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels and Philip Pullman's challenging trilogy *His Dark Materials* flagged up a widening audience and increasing status for children's literature in the West. As Sandra Beckett (2009) notes, children's fiction is now being embraced with enthusiasm by adult readers, writers, critics and publishers. From this increased profile there has emerged the distinct publishing category of 'crossover' fiction. In contrast to earlier children's novels with broad audience appeal, contemporary crossover works are noted for their contextually radical resistance to conventions and bold innovations in content, style and form. Whilst this has given rise to greater critical interest, however, the focus in general has been on adult authored fiction, rather than the now growing body of work being produced and promoted by children and adolescents themselves. In effect, *adult* critics and reviewers either exclude or take for granted young authors' fictions as being formulaic and/or lightweight. The purpose of this study has been to investigate the implications of this stance.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1965) theory of carnival and its associated concepts, I have conducted a comparative analysis of published fiction by adult *and* teenage authors whose works have been identified as subversive and/or marketed as crossover texts. A Bakhtinian perspective on style, structure and themes in each confirms, or otherwise, their radical status before consideration is given to the implications of any differences in approach. Given John Stephens' (1999) observation that boundaries between children's and adults' fiction are more fundamentally blurred in the fantasy and sub-fantasy modes, the influence of genre has been investigated too. My findings indicate that radical texts with broad audience appeal can, in fact, arise through a variety of narrative forms and writing styles and regardless of authorial age. At the same time, characteristic differences in 'perspectives' are shown to mark off adolescent from adult authors' works. I conclude that the young writers' *near-perspectives* can produce hybrid fictions which might be understood as breaking new ground. The fresh insights this study contributes, then, demonstrate that any comprehensive account of the vibrant and ever-shifting contemporary literary scene must encompass broader and altogether more considered critical review of young adults' input than has been offered to-date.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree award of PhD at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Chantal Oliver Signature:

October 2014

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to Anthony Oliver

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Dual Audience Texts

When Phillip Pullman's book *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), the final novel from his trilogy *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), appeared on the Man Booker longlist in 2001, it breached a thirty three year restriction on the inclusion of children's texts in this award, and in doing so flagged up a widening audience and increasing interest in the whole category of children's and young adults' literature. *The Guardian Leader* (2001) proclaimed: 'This is at best a bronze age for literary fiction, with the behemoths of yesteryear (Rushdie, Amis, Barnes) stuck in repetitive middle age. It is, however, turning into rather a golden age for children's fiction'. As if to confirm this trend, Pullman's text, enjoyed by adults and children alike, went on to become the first children's book to win the Whitbread Prize in 2002, a prize J. K. Rowling, the author of the phenomenally successful *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series, had come close to winning in 1999 when, pre-empting the Man Booker, the Whitbread Panel permitted children's texts to contend for the overall prize: 'Rowling came close to unseating the Laureates Heaney and Hughes as overall winner. In the event, her third in the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, won the children's category' (Falconer, 2004: 556). Rowling's global success with this series of books, and subsequently film adaptations, is well documented. Millions of copies have sold worldwide with translations into forty languages. But Pullman and Rowling are not isolated examples. In her study of contemporary children's fiction and its adult readership, Rachel Falconer, for instance, notes how other 'writers of children's and young adult fantasy, including Eoin Colfer, Anthony Horowitz, Garth Nix, G.P. Taylor, and the pseudonymous Lemony Snicket and Lian Hearn, became bestsellers in both children's and adult fiction markets' (2009: 2). As the accolades and awards suggest, children's and young adults' literature seems to be appealing to a broader

demographic, and by '2002, the top thirty books on Amazon.co's general best seller list regularly included children's books' (Falconer, 2004: 556), a trend which has sustained. Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008) of Vampire novels and Suzanne Collins' post-apocalyptic trilogy *Hunger Games* (2008-2010) have been a massive hit with readers across the age range.

As Sandra Beckett rightly points out, however, this is not an entirely new phenomenon; since 'the boundaries between adult and children's fiction were first drawn in the mid-eighteenth century, authors have been crossing them in both directions. The texts of even earlier authors, such as Charles Perrault...John Bunyan, Jonathan Swift' and so on, have traditionally appealed to a 'dual audience of children and adults' (1999, xii). Helma Van Lierop-Debrauwer suggests the reason for these early examples of 'dual readership' authors, who wrote 'for adults as well as children' was mainly financial as the 'target group of young readers was relatively small' (1999: 3). Another significant factor was the lowly status of books aimed at children within social and literary systems. As a consequence, male authors of such texts often published their work anonymously in order to protect their identity, whilst 'the general view was that women were closer to children and better suited to the task' (*ibid*.). However, changing notions of childhood, and new educational theories and practices, combined with expanding literacy to fuel an increasing demand for books specifically for children. As a result, by the nineteenth century 'the financial argument declined and the number of dual-readership authors went down' (*ibid*.). Although as Zohar Shavit (1986), Beckett (1999) and others note the ongoing question of status saw many children's authors continuing to attempt dual address and deny 'any distinction between writing for adults and writing for children' (Shavit, 1986: 41). C.S. Lewis, for instance, makes the claim that 'No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty' (1966: 15).

Nevertheless, Shavit (1986), and others contend that writers of children's texts operate within a certain framework of constraints. In her analysis of socio-cultural and historical trends in European children's literature, Shavit identifies the demand for dual address as a given, and unique to this category of text: the 'children's writer is perhaps the only one who is asked to address one particular audience and at the same time to appeal to another. Society expects the children's writer to be appreciated by both adults (and especially by "the people in culture") and children' (1986: 37). As a consequence, the question of address is a challenging one which writers attempt to deal with in a number of ways. Firstly, they can choose to ignore one of the addressees: child or adult. In the case of the former, writers for children may 'wink slyly over the heads of their child-readers to an imaginary reader; they wink agreeingly to the adults and ignore the child' (Lindgren in Shavit, 1986: 41), an observation which, as I shall discuss below, inevitably reflects adult pre-conceptions about how children read and understand. Shavit identifies this 'ambivalent text' as being 'typical of the canonized system' (1986: 63).

Those authors less concerned with status, on the other hand, can do the reverse and simply ignore the adult reader by adopting a 'single address'. These tend to be categorised as popular works by authors, whom Shavit suggests are likely to be commercially motivated: 'concerned not with whether their books will be able to appeal to adults, but with whether they will sell well' (*ibid*.: 42). This somewhat dismissive assumption about authors who prioritise the child addressee ironically undermines her critique of commentators who: 'when it comes to evaluating children's culture...ignore the child's opinion and focus on the adult's' (*ibid*.: 38), and perhaps fails to recognise the potential value of single address texts. As Barbara Wall points out in *The Narrator's Voice: Dilemma of Children's Fiction*, such attitudes have 'helped to obscure the fact that writers who address children and leave adult readers no other role than child-addressee may also be both fine writers, and writers who serve children's needs' (1991: 36). The fact that these

books are not valued by adult critics also suggests that perhaps there is a distinct aesthetic by which children's books ought to judged, something David Rudd (2000) addresses in his analysis of Enid Blyton texts.

Shavit (1986) contends that the use of ambivalent - or what Jacqueline Rose (1992) identifies pejoratively as 'double' - and single address is unusual as most writers attempt what she terms 'dual address' in that they endeavour to address child and adult simultaneously. In doing this, they accept as a framework the constraints imposed by 'the problem of their specific addressee' (Shavit, 1986: 42). This accommodation is primarily evident in the assumptions the writer maintains about the possible understanding of the text by its reader, 'especially in regard to the following aspects (which, of course, are mutually dependent): the text's complexity, the structure of the narration, the stylistic level, and the subject matter' (*ibid.*). The last two in particular are seen by Shavit to mark it out as children's literature. In her analysis of the differences between adult and children's fiction, Wall (1991) acknowledges similar defining characteristics. The key distinction for her, though, is the style of narratorial address, that is, 'not what is said, but the way it is said, and to whom it is said, which marks a book for children' (1991: 2). In children's literature this has a special significance as a consequence of the age gap between addresser and addressee. In her analysis, then, the focus is on the voice within the text: 'the voice we hear as we listen to the story being told' (*ibid*.: 4). Drawing on the narrative theory of Wayne Booth (1961), Wall's account identifies this as the narrator, as opposed to the implied author who is positioned outside of the text: 'the face behind the page' (*ibid*.: 5). Wall argues that it is the relationship between the narrator and narratee, 'the shadowy being within the story' (*ibid*.: 4) whom the narrator addresses, which 'is of fundamental importance in identifying fiction for children and distinguishing it from fiction for adults' (*ibid*.: 3). Albeit with different emphasis, Wall, like Shavit, refers to different styles of address: 'single', 'double' and 'dual', which are defined in conjunction with the various roles they offer to adult readers of children's fiction.

The historical precedent for dual audience texts, then, is identified by both Shavit (1986) and Wall (1991) and acknowledged by Beckett (1999), although Wall's definition of children's literature would exclude a number of the canonical children's texts cited in Beckett's account, because 'if a story is not written to children, then it does not form part of the genre writing for children' (Wall, 1991: 2). In *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults* (1999), however, Beckett's editorial focus is on the latter half of the twentieth century and, in particular, contemporary writing in which 'the cross-audience phenomenon has become so widespread that a new word recently has been coined in some languages to refer to this literature for all ages, as for example the term "allalderslitteratur" in Norwegian' (Beckett, 1999: xiv). In contrast to Wall and Shavit, Beckett's dual audience authors are seen to resist, rather than accept, the constraints imposed 'as a framework for handling the problem of their specific addressee' (Shavit, 1986: 42). Unlike their predecessors, contemporary dual audience texts are characterised by innovation and experiment: 'Strongly influenced by the aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism, children's literature now reflects the dominant trends in adult literature and sometimes even initiates them' (Beckett, 1999: xvii).

Whilst the low status of children's authors and the aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism have, inevitably, been influential in the shift towards more innovative and experimental writing for children in the latter decades of the twentieth century, a trend which has gained momentum into the twenty-first century, they can offer only a partial account. In their investigations of radical young adult literature, Alison Waller (2009) and Kimberley Reynolds (2007), for example, note how increasing prosperity and a changing economy in the post-war era led to an 'extension' of childhood and the emergence of a 'teenage' culture from the 1950s onwards in the West:

> ...young people who would once have joined the workforce and been absorbed into adult culture were legislated into schools until their mid-teens...liberated from the demands of work, they had the time, the inclination, and the money to explore themselves and to discover that there

> were ways of having fun and responding to the changes in size, shape, and the desires of their bodies which were outside of the familiar world of family. Youth culture had arrived (Reynolds, 2007: 71).

A new category of 'teenage' and more recently 'young adult' fiction thus emerged addressing the often contentious issues related to 'teenage identity and concerns, as distinct from those associated with adulthood and childhood' (*ibid*.: 72). In his analysis of Western young adult literature, Michael Cart notes how this classification itself has been further extended in the last ten years as a consequence of economic hard times, increasing life expectancy, scientific research and so on: the term young adult 'must now also include nineteen- to twenty-five-year olds (or even older, as the twelve-to thirty-four MTV demographic has become an increasingly desirable market in publishing)' (2010: 119). Ever-shifting notions of 'childhood' and changing socio-cultural perspectives, then, are also clearly significant in the 'liberation' of authors from conventional constraints.

In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, feminism played a significant role in the production of more relevant and representative texts with the attention it focused on female oppression and the nature of 'traditional' gendered identities. Children's texts, seen by many at that time as playing an important formative role in children's consciousness, were identified as offering only limited and passive or non-active roles for girls. Issues of representation were simultaneously called into question by the changing demographics of post-imperial Britain and resulted in an increased awareness of the importance and the benefits of inclusion and widening perspectives. As Margaret Meek points out, it was an environment within which publishers in English speaking countries were 'forced to acknowledge the presence in school classrooms of children who could not find themselves portrayed in the pictures or the texts they were given to read' (2004: 7). These shifting perceptions opened the way for new authors with 'distinctive voices' and literary skill and ultimately contributed to significant changes within the children's literature category, which in today's Britain 'represents more

positively the multicultural life of the societies from which it emerges', although we are still some way 'from accepting multicultural social life as the norm for all children growing up' (*ibid*.).

Running alongside these shifting attitudes has been the advance of technologies which have provided authors and publishers with greater scope for experimentation in the production and promotion of texts. Meek observes this acknowledgement in children's picture books: 'The textual varieties and variations such as result from modern methods of production and design and the apparently inexhaustible novelty of publishing formats' allow them to push back 'the conventional boundaries of content and style' (2004: 5) and, of course, provide hitherto unknown opportunities to deliver and market children's texts for all ages through a variety of media outlets. Indeed, in an increasingly affluent Western society, where the push for children to learn to read 'now begins sooner than at any time in the past' (*ibid*.: 4), the demand for books to assist in this process is easily met. Today, books and their associated products are both affordable and widely available, albeit in child-friendly bookshops, supermarkets, department stores, fuel stations, on the internet and so on and, for Meek, this huge increase in availability is a central factor in their growing popularity. The impact of media adaptations should also be noted, as evidence suggests that they lead to an increase in book sales as opposed to the reduction that some more pessimistic critics anticipated: 'publicity surrounding a feature film...or the launch of a new TV show helps spread the word of the source material and opens the book to new audiences who might have otherwise not considered reading it' (Peterson, About.com Book Publishing).

So, changing technologies and altering perspectives have led to greater opportunities for the 'tougher' and 'bolder' content and representation that Boyd Tonkin (2005), Cart (2010) and others commend: the field of children's and young adults' literature, has 'become increasingly open to experiments in style, structure and narrative form' (Cart, 2010: 75). At the same time, expanding marketing opportunities and extensive availability have created and catered to an

increasing demand for such texts. Rudd (2004), Falconer (2004) and others also note the significance of new technologies, with regard to the impact they have on conventional power relations between adult and adolescent and child. That is, as well as offering a potentially levelling anonymity in which the voice of children and adolescents may be heard on equal terms (Rudd: 32), they have created an environment in which young people are valued for their input and expertise. This has led to a growth of their influence in the traditionally adult domain of business and a 'dominance of youth in new corporations like Microsoft' (Falconer, 2004: 569). Chris Anderson's (2000) investigation into this escalating influence highlights this expertise and the 'corporate restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s' which broke down conventional hierarchies by placing 'greater value on younger employees' (cited in Falconer, 2004: 569). For Falconer, these factors have contributed to a culture of youth in which 'age is becoming a matter of choice. You can opt to be young, culturally if not chronologically' (Falconer, 2004: 569). She suggests that the creation of this 'kiddult' culture, or what many critics derisively refer to as 'adultessence', has fuelled 'the dramatic rise in consumption of children's products. Like it or not children are big business' (*ibid*.).

1.2. Assumptions of Disempowerment

For Jack Zipes (2007), however, this commercialisation of children's culture devalues any concept of a 'golden era' (*The Guardian Leader*, 2001) and makes 'irrelevant' issues of 'quality' in children's texts. He suggests that the popularity of children's literature in contemporary society works to position the child as a potential consumer and, consequently, books are chosen and valued for their marketability. As indicated, any book now is likely to be linked with many other products such as films, games, DVDs, toys, stationery and so on. In this environment books have come to be associated with 'goods and status', as opposed to being a source of exploration and self-discovery for children, whom he positions as dangerously disempowered consumers of a culture that has been constructed for them by adults. It is certainly true that children's consumer status might make them vulnerable to exploitation, although, I would argue, it could also

be seen to empower them, by forcing 'big business' to court them and canvas their views, as well as, cater to their interests and demands. And although advancing technologies enhance opportunities for commercially driven adult manipulation, they also offer an arena where children can be seen and heard increasingly on their own terms. For instance, children's book awards ceremonies, although still organised and promoted by adults for commercial purposes, are increasingly judged by children and appear in both adults' and children's media. In 2007, the popular television programmes *Blue Peter* and *Richard and Judy*, for example, featured children discussing their favoured texts and explaining the reasons for their choices, and *The Guardian* young critics' competition, inspired by 'the enthusiasm of 14 year old Aidan Turner' invited thirteen to fourteen year olds to review the eight titles on 'the 2007 Guardian children's fiction prize longlist' (Eccleshare, 2007). On the internet, forums for young people to discuss children's books, films and so on abound. More significant in the discussion of children's empowerment, are the increasing number of websites set up and run by young people themselves: 'www.coolreads.co.uk' established by two teenage boys in 2003 publishes book reviews and comments from ten to fifteen year olds only, whilst the editors of 'www.spinebreakers.co.uk', another website for young reading enthusiasts, describe themselves as 'a bunch of 13-18 year olds who love books and have created loads of juicy content around…top reads' (www.spinebreakers, 2007).

Young writers, too, have achieved access to wider audiences through websites like *KidPub* (www.kidipub.com) and *Kids on the Net* which 'invite children to submit their writing' (www.kidsonthenet.org.uk, 2007), whilst more conventionally published work has received serious critical attention and is read by children and adults alike. Nineteen year old Faïza Guène's novel *Just Like Tomorrow* (2004/2006) 'has been a huge hit in France...It has been translated into 26 languages and is a rare example of popular French language work that has broken out of the Francophone ghetto, lauded by critics in the Arab world and in the New York Times alike' (Burke, 2006). Christopher Paolini's fantasy epic *Eragon* (2004), although less favoured by literary critics, was 'the number one

children's bestseller' in Britain only two weeks after its publication and outsold *Harry Potter* in the United States, 'not bad for a book written when Paolini was 15' (Spring, 2004). Further success has followed with the transfer of Paolini's story to the big screen, only months after the publication of *Eldest* (2006), the second novel in this trilogy. Another young author attracting attention is seventeen year old Helen Oyeyemi whose novel *The Icarus Girl*, was published to a 'considerable fanfare' (Downer, 2005) in January 2005. Such examples, then, indicate young people's increasing input into and control of their own culture, as reviewers, readers and writers/producers which when combined with their transgressions into traditionally 'adult' arenas, problematizes any notion of them as simply passive recipients of a culture driven by predatory adult motivations, an assumption which, of itself, rests on a somewhat reductive assessment of adults who write for children. In fact, a number of adult authors like Pullman and David Almond, produce provocative fiction which can be seen to actively challenge passive consumption by inviting its readers to become, at the very least, co-constructors of the stories written for them. So whilst it is certainly true that a consumer culture predominates, homogenising assumptions about adult culpability and endorsement of this culture, and children's positioning as powerless recipients of it, are perhaps less straightforward than Zipes' argument suggests.

Zipes' assumptions of youthful disempowerment, nevertheless, have and continue to characterise much critical analysis of children's and young adult culture and texts. Traditionally disregarded as a topic for serious investigation, Deborah Cogan Thacker notes how the increasing profile of children's fiction, alongside the proliferation of theory in literary teaching have opened up 'new opportunities to venture into largely uncharted territory' (2004: 45). That is, the opportunity to explore texts through diverse perspectives, from feminist approaches, through psychoanalytical criticism and narratology to postcolonial theory, has led to greater acknowledgement of the relevance of children's culture as a topic suitable for academic investigation. Despite these changing attitudes, however, in 'terms of the demands of cultural theory, children-as-readers are largely invisible' (*ibid*.:

46). Rudd (2000) picks up on the problems caused by this neglect in his investigation into the enduring popularity of Enid Blyton's fiction. In his analysis, he contends that traditional approaches to children's literature are too often subjective and lacking in methodological grounding, and 'even where more systematic investigations are undertaken, they are frequently too narrow...It is particularly the case with critics of Blyton, many of whom make their pronouncements with no thought of consulting the primary readership' (Rudd, 2000: 6). The most obvious example of this inadequacy can be identified in the text-centred approach which for Rudd is too reliant on the views 'enshrined in F.R. Leavis's "great tradition"', with its implicit notion that 'good' books 'transcend differences of class, race and gender and espouse universal truths' (*ibid*.: 8). As Rudd points out, this type of model takes no account of the readership and will inevitably exclude Blyton 'as a negative exemplar of literature' (*ibid*.). Equally, the child-centred approach, greatly influenced by Jean Piaget's now contested developmental model of childhood, although more positive in its acknowledgement of things that appeal to children in literature at 'different ages' is flawed, somewhat ironically, by its exclusion of the child resulting from its presumption to 'know' it (*ibid*.: 9). In a similar way, Reader Response theory with its promising recognition of the reader 'as an active maker of meaning' is also ultimately undermined by adult perspectives which in practice, fail to recognise 'the complexity of children's reading' (*ibid*.: 10).

Rudd's study, then, is based on the premise that it is unproductive to judge children's fiction, and particularly Blyton's work, solely in terms of what 'adults' consider good or great literature. In his analysis, he attempts to address these difficulties and achieve a wider perspective by adopting a cultural studies model which investigates not only the texts, 'but their production and consumption too: that is the context and subtext of the text' (*ibid*.: 7). Utilising this more expansive and inclusive model, he is able to identify Blyton's stories as having a distinct aesthetic which seems to appeal uniquely to children, and which suggests that what they value in texts differs from what adults are likely to value. This, in turn, provides insights into Blyton's continuing popularity with children in a multi-

cultural world when we as adults generally view her work as being embarrassingly 'landlocked in an outmoded age, of being middle-class, snobbish, sexist, racist, colonialist, and so on' (*ibid*.: 3). The shift towards more inclusive models in children's literary criticism, as characterised by Rudd's approach, owes much to feminist theories. In 'Criticism and the Critical Mainstream', Thacker highlights the influence of 'women's studies, particularly with regard to the recuperation of texts written by women [which] has transformed the ways in which literary histories are now written' (2004: 47). Thacker recognises the benefits gained for children's literature criticism through 'the emphasis on aspects of literary history concerned with gender, and thus with the importance of the embedding of cultural "norms" through education and nurture' (*ibid*.). The feminist emphasis on 'otherness' and 'difference', familiar too in postcolonial accounts, also resonates within children's literature criticism. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978), a seminal text in postcolonial studies, identifies this 'otherness' or 'difference' in his observation of the Orient as being defined negatively in terms of the West: 'a mirror image of what is inferior and alien ("Other")' (in Sered, 1996). It is easy to see the relevance of this emphasis, then, when discussing texts for the child whom 'we…as rational adults, recognise…as different and in need of explanation' (Jenks, 1992: 10). However, as suggested by Rudd's analysis of Blyton's literature for children, how we understand and define 'difference' or 'otherness' is not unproblematic and inevitably impacts on the effectiveness of any such approach.

Diana Fuss in her book *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (1989: xiv) flags up these difficulties in her examination of what she describes as the 'essentialist-structuralist' binarism within feminism. Arguing from the position of an 'anti-essentialist who wants to preserve the category of essence', she explores the contradictions manifested in this division, which on the one hand, embraces the notion of 'a female essence – outside boundaries of social' and on the other, the belief that 'essence itself is an historical construction' (*ibid*.: 2). Certainly in the poststructuralist, feminist environment, greatly influenced by the writings of 'Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida (two poststructuralists who have

made especially important contributions to constructionist thought)' (*ibid*.: xii), essentialist notions of natural categories and arguments based on a universality of 'experience' are refuted in favour of a constructionist view of the natural as a product of the social, compromising complicated discursive practices. Constructionists argue that the essentialist production of categories such as 'man' or 'woman', for instance, ignore key factors in their development as they evolve through a view of history itself as an 'unbroken continuum that transports across cultures and through time, categories such as "man" and "woman" without in any way (re)defining' them' (*ibid*.: 3). Such a view clearly fails to allow for the fact that 'what the classical Greeks understood by "man" and "woman" is radically different from what the Renaissance French understood them to signify' (*ibid*.). However, as Fuss points out, constructionists themselves are unable to avoid entirely the pitfall of 'uncomplicated or essentialising notions of history' (*ibid*.). For example, in their argument that "man" or "woman" are the product of a spectrum of discourses, they nevertheless resort to 'at least the linguistic retention of these particular terms' (*ibid*.: 4). Fuss concludes, then, that the two positions are co-implicated with each other, that constructionism is merely 'a more sophisticated form of essentialism' (*ibid*.: xii).

In his analysis of how this essentialist/constructionist divide has impacted on children's literary criticism, Rudd draws similar conclusions. In 'Theorising and Theories: The Conditions of Possibility in Children's Literature', he is critical of accounts which rest, on the one hand, on the assumption of some 'underlying "essential" child whose nature and needs we can know, or on the other, the notion that the child is nothing but the product of adult discourse (as some social constructionists argue)' (2004: 29). Like Fuss (1989), he concludes that both approaches are co-implicated, and, further, argues that in practice they succeed in excluding the child. In his challenge to essentialist narratives which in the case of children's literature tend to construct a story 'of a movement from darkness to light - just as developmental psychologists, like Piaget, envisage the child growing from an original, autistic state to adult rationality' (*ibid*.), Rudd is echoing revised theories of childhood in the social sciences. In *The Sociology of*

Childhood Essential Readings, for instance, Chris Jenks (1982) challenges the assumptions of an 'essential' child implicit in conventional accounts like Piaget's. The problem with this kind of model, he argues, is that the child is imagined in 'advance of the theorizing and then dismissed' (1982: 10). In effect, childhood is identified as a stage: a somehow knowable and 'natural' but temporary condition or period of induction into a taken for granted, static and rational adult world. Such an identification he believes, 'condemns him to be an absent presence, a nominal cipher without an active dimension', rather than a social category in its own right (*ibid*.: 13). For Jenks, it is the potentially disintegrative threat that this community presents to sociological worlds 'a way of conduct that cannot properly be evaluated and routinely incorporated within the grammar of existing social systems' that results in the theory moving to 'envelope the child in its own projections' (*ibid*.: 15). As a consequence, this archetype 'is sustained in language and within the language communities of the institutions and specialisms which serve to patrol the boundaries around childhood as a social status' (*ibid*.). Jenks' propositions and, in particular, his identification of the child as a social construction used to promote social cohesion, echoes the work of Rose's psychoanalytical analysis of children's fiction.

In *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984/1992), Rose argues that in 'discussions of children's fiction which make their appeal to Freud, childhood is part of a strict developmental sequence at the end of which stands the cohered and rational consciousness of the adult mind' (1992: 13). This reductive account, she suggests, is a means of holding off the 'challenge...to the very notions of identity, development and subjective cohesion which this conception of childhood is so often used to sustain' (*ibid*.). In her analysis of J.M. Barrie's works she suggests that the very concept of children's fiction and what it should represent is driven by Freudian insecurities in the adult. She argues that these insecurities lead to 'a form of investment by the adult in the child' which, in turn, leads to 'a demand which fixes the child and then holds it in place' (*ibid*.: 4). For Rose, the whole enterprise of children's literature is impossible: it merely 'gives us the child' but does not 'speak to the child' and that to suggest the child

is inside the book is to 'confuse the adult's intention to get at the child with the child it portrays' (*ibid*.: 2). For these reasons, she insists on the importance of maintaining 'certain psychic barriers' which 'should go undisturbed, the most important of which is the barrier between adult and child. When children's fiction touches on that barrier, it becomes not experiment…but *molestation*' (*ibid*.: 70). However, Rudd (2004) sees this type of constructionist account as being limiting and, in practice, as problematic as the essentialist approach it seeks to challenge. Whilst acknowledging the value of Rose's contribution he, nevertheless, takes issue with her 'neglect of the child as a social being, with a voice' (*ibid*.: 30). That is, he argues that the 'constructed' child within the text of Rose's analysis - as well as those of fellow constructionists James Kincaid (1992) and Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) – rests on an acknowledgement or invocation of a child existing 'outside' of the text. This implies a distinct being separated out from adult society, an accusation which I would add might, in turn, be made of Rudd's (2000) own identification of Blyton's *specific* audience appeal.

Rudd (2004) goes on to suggest that Rose's claim 'the "child" has no "voice" within the hierarchies of our society, because "adults" either silence or create that voice', ironically results in the construction of this 'child as a helpless, powerless being, and contributes to the culturally hegemonic norm' (Rudd, 2004: 31). The proposed solution to the exclusion encompassed by both the essentialist and constructionist models is in what Rudd identifies as the 'constructive' child. Highlighting the centrality of language to the development of the '"infant" (literally, one incapable of speech) to a discursively situated being' (2004: 35). Rudd, draws on a Foucauldian (1967) model of power which allows for the possibility of the socially constructed child's 'resistance' through its access to a variety of discourses, which in turn, permit different subject positions to be taken up. Referencing Homi Bhabha's (1994) observation of the colonial situation, Rudd notes that 'those who effectively wield power - adults in this case, are never secure in their position' (Rudd, 2004: 35) because power is 'an effect of discursive relations which are productive as well as repressive' (*ibid*.). So, whilst it may be true that the adult is unable to avoid addressing the child, his/her success

in this project is inevitably compromised, because language itself is multi-accented. Referencing Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), Rudd argues because 'the word is always half someone else's...the attempt to avoid hybrid contamination is fated: it refuses to mean just what the author intends, "neither more nor less"' (2004: 38). This notion of hybridity reflects the uncertainty surrounding childhood and adulthood and is 'expressive of that uneasy transaction along borders, in which something other is gradually brought within, melded into adulthood' (Rudd, 2004: 35). Rudd argues that it is partly in 'recognition of this lack of control, [that] children's texts have become increasingly explicit in their hybridity…And today this hybrid relation has been foregrounded to the extent that many see a blurring of boundaries between adult and child literatures' (*ibid*.).

In such fiction previously taboo topics and complex narrative strategies are seen to transgress the 'traditional demarcations separating children's from adult literature' (Beckett, 1999: xvii). John Stephens, in his analysis of Australian realist fiction for young adults, examines these transgressions and concludes that they give this genre 'much in common with adult fiction' placing it 'in a middle ground between literature for children and literature for adults' (1999: 196), but in contrast to critics like Van Lierop-Debrauwer who question 'whether or not the traditional borderline between children's and adult literature still exists' (1999: 4), Stephens contends that cross writing authors do, in fact, continue to maintain a clear distinction between the two. For him 'the thematic domination of identity issues and the deployment of focalisation in order to realize particular subject positions' (1999: 196) is evidence of this continuing division. Whilst Stephens concedes that the boundaries in a number of fantasy sub-genres are 'endemically more blurred', he suggests that 'the one remove from reality' in such texts means that 'culturally, there is less at issue' (*ibid*.: 185). This latter contention is problematic given the recent controversies surrounding children's fantasy texts. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, for example, has drawn disapproval from a number of right leaning evangelical critics in the United States for promoting 'an interest in magic and the occult. Parents, whether Christian or not, must take an active role in what their children are being exposed to and determine what is

appropriate' (Christian Answers, www.christiananswers.net). Pullman's *His Dark Materials* is similarly criticised for its anti-religious theme. In 'Dust and Daemons', the author Michael Chambon poses the question of 'whether or not *His Dark Materials* is meant or even suitable for young readers' (2004: 3). Stephens' contention then, that 'arguments about appropriate audiences' (Stephens, 1999: 185) tend to focus on contemporary realism is clearly compromised by such critiques.

1.3. Intertextuality: Understanding the Text

Although he recognises an ongoing distinction between children's and adults' texts, Stephens' acknowledgement of the empowering, dialogic potential in fiction within an environment in which the boundaries are increasingly challenged, is convincing and reflects the themes explored in his book *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (1992). In this study, he flags up the radicalising trend occurring in children's literature generally: 'Since about 1960 there has appeared a variety of books which broadly share an impulse to create roles for child characters which interrogate the normal subject positions created for children within socially dominant ideological frames' (1992: 120). In Stephens' 'interrogative' text type, intertextuality - a process which produces meaning 'from the interrelationships between audience, text, other texts, and socio-cultural determinations' (*ibid*: 84) - and other textual practices play a role in the creation of liberating subject positions for young readers. This empowerment is exemplified by Clare Walsh in 'From "Capping" to Intercision: Metaphors/Metonyms of Mind Control in the Young Adult Fiction of John Christopher and Philip Pullman':

> Both Christopher and Pullman are capable of producing extravagantly playful flourishes in their writing for children/young adults, often involving wide-ranging intertextual allusions, but far from isolating them from adult concerns, their aim is to expose them to important political, scientific and, in Pullman's case, theological issues in an honest and unpatronizing way (2003: 248).

Christine Wilkie (1999) picks up on this theme in 'Relating Texts: Intertextuality' in which she explores the significance of intertextuality in children's literature. Like Stephens, she identifies 'all texts and all readings' as intertextual; texts are 'produced and readers make sense of them…in relation to already embedded codes which dwell in texts and readers (and in authors too, since they are readers of texts before they are authors)' (1999: 131). In writing for children this has 'peculiar implications' due to the asymmetry of power she identifies in the 'reader/writer axis', which sees texts written 'for' children by adults and within which 'children's intertextual knowledge' is not 'assured' (*ibid.*).

This assumption is implicit in Millicent Lenz's analysis of *His Dark Materials* which echoes the above critiques of Pullman's anti-religious theme: 'Jacobs correctly observes that few people, especially young readers, have the contextual knowledge necessary to critique the novel's perspective from the standpoint of Christian doctrine...Others may argue that young readers will simply devour the story and leave the theological and historical world-view to adults' (2001: 159). In their observations, Lenz and her fellow critics reveal adult concerns that children will be unable to fully realise the text's meaning and this, at its worst, represents indoctrination. This conclusion, however, seems to rest on the assumption of a rather naïve and passive audience who will respond uniformly to the text and, as indicated, there are problems with this kind of approach to children's literature criticism, as it fails to recognise children's potential for 'resistance' to adult narratives through their access to various alternative discourses. It may be correct to assume that children are less likely than adults to be familiar with Pullman's intertextual references, but it is improbable that in a *contemporary* society where religious and environmental issues have become increasingly foregrounded - and in which children have access, as never before, to 'incontinent streams' (Meek, 2004: 7) of information, from a diversity of media outlets and in a variety of formats - that Pullman's younger readers will have little or no contextual knowledge within which to make sense of his trilogy. Equally, Lenz's observation that it is 'just possible' that the intertextual allusions will

provoke teenage readers 'to explore these historical and theological questions further' (*ibid*.), perhaps underestimates the inherent inducement to active participation. *His Dark Materials*, a reworking of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), itself a revision of *Genesis*, for instance, has produced a whole series of linked satellite texts. To identify it as a 'possible' pre-text, then, fails to acknowledge the evident potential for an interactive response which can encourage and enrich further reading.

Robyn McCallum (1999) makes this point in her analysis of metafictive and experimental texts for children; endorsing Margaret Mackey's (1990) view, she argues that challenging children's literature can 'foster an awareness of how a story works' and can implicitly teach readers how texts are structured through specific codes and conventions (in McCallum, 1999: 139). The pitfalls of adult pre-conceptions about children's reading and understanding are highlighted by Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, in which they point out that adult readers are more likely to base their judgements of children's literature on 'guesses…But making accurate guesses is difficult, maybe even impossible' (2003: 15) and, for this reason, it is better to look at what is 'special' about a given text: what it 'requires a reader to do' (*ibid.*: 18). Stephens also acknowledges this difficulty: 'we can never really know what happens when a reader reads, and this is exacerbated when the reader is a child' (1992: 48).

As demonstrated in this chapter, then, much children's literature criticism takes for granted an unquestioned asymmetry of power in the 'reader/writer axis' and assumes clear distinctions between reader understandings in terms of age. Wilkie's, positioning of young readers as 'powerless recipients of what adults choose to write for them' (Wilkie, 1999: 131), for instance, is implied in Zipes' (2007) analysis and echoed in the critiques of Pullman's texts: 'Pullman's many layered story' works almost exclusively on the level of 'a suspenseful adventure for children' (Lenz, 2001: 123). As Rose (1992) points out this homogenisation of younger readers is problematic as it assumes understanding of how 'all' children read and, in doing so, takes little account of divisions in class, culture, education,

levels of maturity and so on between children. Equally, the positioning of the young as 'passive recipients' of texts denies the possibility for resistance identified in Rudd's (2004) 'constructive' reader: a potential arguably enhanced in contemporary society by children's widening access to multiple media discourses, which are increasingly difficult to censor or 'police'. In any assessment of children's or young adult literature, then, it is important to acknowledge a diverse and more knowing audience who in contemporary Western society have an increasingly visible and acknowledged input into their own culture as readers, reviewers, producers and writers. This input undoubtedly raises new questions with regard to representation, understanding and address. Are younger writers, for instance, because of their less honed critical faculties, lack of lived experience and the reduced pressure on them to appeal to a dual audience less able, or less inclined than the accomplished mature writer to resist conventional narrative strategies and to produce challenging 'crossover' texts? Alternatively, does the opportunity for unselfconscious single address actually foster transgressive writing strategies by removing the adult inhibitions implied in Stephens' (1999) above noted account? In effect, can the potential for new perspectives and freedom from constraints, when coupled with the increasing sophistication of today's young adults and a perceived propensity to resist authority, actually lead to more authentically interrogative and hybrid texts?

1.4. A New Approach

In an attempt to avoid some of the above noted pitfalls of the adult critic's pre-conceptions with regard to 'children's', or indeed 'adults'' reading and understanding, the identification of radical crossover potential in this study, will focus on each text's possibilities, that is, what a text 'requires' (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003: 18) of a reader and how this impacts on audience appeal. As in Stephens' (1992) analysis of children's fiction, I shall employ Bakhtin's theory of carnival and associated concepts to confirm or otherwise the empowering and radical status of the texts assessed. Because this approach explores 'strategies by

which point of view is established' (Walsh, 2012: 13) it will also allow me to make generational comparisons in the context of the assumptions and understandings narrative stance implies.

Developed across a number of works, Bakhtin's discourse theory is grounded in his identification of language as a socio-historical process which produces meaning according to context. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984/2009), for instance, language is understood as an intertextual, multi-voiced or 'polyphonic' dialogue between past and present voices and views. In this 'dialogic' environment, meaning becomes irreducible and contested rather than stable or fixed: 'Bakhtin sees language as an ongoing, unending chain of meaning which is constantly renewed and reborn through each link in the chain' (Robinson, 2011a). In his study of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin identifies them as polyphonic works in which multiple and contesting voices are given free play, rather than being subordinated to any overarching authorial ideal:

> What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event (Bakhtin, 2009: 6).

These understandings are further extended in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981/2004) where similar interaction is noted between different speech 'genres'. However, in contrast to polyphony where voices interact on equal terms, this engagement, or 'heteroglossia', foregrounds the clash between competing social speech modes: these are styles of language which express and attempt to embed the ideals, values and perspectives of different societal institutions or groups. In a heteroglossic environment, 'unofficial' discourses disrupt and fragment the notions of fixed truths by which privileged, official discourses seek to secure and retain their power. In *Rabelais and His World* (1965/1984), for example, the popular discourse of 'carnival' parodies and deflates the centralising or 'monologic' discourse of a serious, all powerful church and state.

Bakhtin's carnival 'does not employ the same vocabulary of dialogism that we find in *Dostoevsky's Poetics* and the essays of *The Dialogic Imagination*' (Pearce, 2009: 59), but as Lynne Pearce observes:

> …there is no doubt that...'carnival' is an inherently dialogised concept: both the actual carnivals and the languages and literatures associated with them are manifestly polyphonic and heteroglossic, sites upon which all manner of voices and languages break free from hierarchical/authorial control' (*ibid*.).

In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin links carnival to folk humour and the pageants of popular culture originating in the medieval 'Feast of Fools'. In this religious festival the lower ranks of the cathedral openly mocked church hierarchy and sacred religious rites. The mixing of high culture and low creates a new and more democratic environment in which polyphony flourishes and genuine dialogue can take place: 'a special type of communication impossible in everyday life' (Bakhtin, 1984: 10). The carnivalesque literary mode, then, by employing the characteristic 'parodies, travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings' of carnival proper, effects 'a temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' (*ibid*: 10-11) and, in doing so, allows new understandings and perspectives to emerge. In contrast to the monologic literary mode which resolves, suppresses or excludes inconvenient dialogue, carnivalized writing encourages critical reading by enabling the reading self to engage with multiple voices and points of view.

This empowerment is particularly significant in children's literature, a traditionally monologic mode emerging from socio-cultural understandings of childhood as a significant period of human development. As indicated, works in this category have been inclined to position implied young readers to accept the dominant values and understandings of the culture in which they are produced:

> Western societies on the whole aspire to encourage their children to grow up as reasonable, creative, autonomous and achieving human beings, and these ideals are furthered by the ideological positions implicit in the literature for children. These ideals, however, may often conflict with notions of social co-operation, which require children to obey rules...and to accept subordinate roles...[and may] still vary on gender bases...as when girls are encouraged to develop docile 'feminine' roles (Stephens, 1992: 120).

In effect, adult authors 'school' or 'coach' children in preparation for social integration and positive transition to 'autonomous' adulthood. In her essay on ideology in children's fiction, Elizabeth Parsons observes that this 'teaching can come through' language use, image, plot-structure and so on: 'a story usually rewards or celebrates a character because he or she is acting (or learns to act) in line with the kind of values espoused by the empowered adult culture' (2011: 114). As the above noted criticism of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* confirms, however, this didacticism can create tensions where there is disagreement about the beliefs/ideals being taught.

Highly regarded for its scope and literary ambition, 'many critics feel that Pullman's work can better lay claim to the crossover label [than the first Harry Potter novels] because it is much more sophisticated, complex and multilayered' (Beckett, 2009: 116). Radical and challenging in content, style and approach, Pullman's trilogy is hailed by critics for opposing dominant socio-cultural discourses and disrupting traditional categories of age and genre. In *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Millicent Lenz, for instance, praises Pullman for his 'innovations on the traditional heroic roles…[which] centre on the sharing of quests between Will and Lyra' (2001: 157). Clare Walsh, on the other hand, observes that Pullman's empowering narrative goes against the tendency in children's fantasy fiction to contain young protagonists in a 'world of childhood innocence' (2003: 241). As we have seen, however, *His Dark Materials* is viewed less positively by those who regard the story's stance against orthodox religion as a 'step too far'. Provoking controversy in both popular and critical review, Pullman's ambitious reworking of Milton's epic is regarded as being inappropriate for children's fiction, because in it the young heroes are pitted *against* and must overcome a wholly corrupt church and its terrifying, omniscient God. Once this theocracy has been defeated, the protagonists initiate a democratic, ostensibly secular system in its place. In a scathing condemnation of this re-imagining, polemicist Peter Hitchens denounces it as anti-religious 'propaganda' (2002: 63) which attempts to propagate atheistic beliefs amongst the young. In a

more considered critical analysis David Gooderham raises similar concerns. In 'Fantasizing It As It Is: Religious Language in Philip Pullman's Trilogy, *His Dark Materials'*, he argues that the style and manner of Pullman's attack on "Christian beliefs, values and practices" (2003: 157*)* represent an entirely unacceptable breach within the conventions of children's fantasy literature, and 'lay themselves open to…charges of…indoctrination' (*ibid.:* 166) because they inhibit an imaginative response. And Pullman's detractors are not alone in noting an uncompromisingly 'anti-religious' stance. Highlighting the author's expressed distaste for Lewis's "life-hating ideology" (Pullman in Hatlen, 2005: 82), for instance, Burton Hatlen identifies Pullman's ambitious and 'inventive' story as 'a kind of "anti-Narnia", a secular humanist alternative to Lewis's Christian fantasy' (2005: 82).

Whilst it would be disingenuous to deny the powerful didactic impulse that these analyses point up, I would argue that aside from implying 'a somewhat questionable homogenisation of young readers' (Oliver, 2011: 293), accusations of anti-religious propaganda ironically suggest a somewhat literal and limited interpretation of the texts. In the exemplar below, I shall demonstrate how Bakhtinian understandings of carnival, in fact, position Pullman's religious narrative as an empowering polyphonic rather exclusively 'atheistic' account. That is, a Bakhtinian perspective will be used to foreground the possibilities Pullman's carnivalized discourse offers for active engagement with differing and competing views.

1.5. Case Study: 'Mocking God'

As I point out in my journal article 'Mocking God and Celebrating Satan: Parodies and Profanities in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*', triumph over theocratic rule in Pullman's fantasy 'is preceded by the heretical destruction of "the Authority" or "God" himself' (Oliver, 2011: 295). It is perhaps this event more than any other which has caused the greatest controversy and offence to Christians. In an article for 'Inside Catholic' magazine, Cynthia Grenier, for

instance, describes it as ‘about the most disturbing action of all for those who believe in organised religion: the annihilation of God himself’ (2001). The scene in question occurs towards the end of the trilogy when the texts’ young protagonists Lyra and Will happen upon God’s ‘convoy’ in the midst of a ‘cliff-ghast’ attack. After overcoming the assailants, they discover a physically weak and terrified ‘old...angel’ cowering in the corner of a mud-smeared ‘crystal cell’ (Pullman, 2000: 431). Unaware of his true identity, they release the pitiful ‘ancient of days’ from his battered glass box, only to stare on in amazement as his form immediately begins to ‘loosen and dissolve’: within moments ‘he...vanished completely...[with a] sigh of the most profound and exhausted relief’ (*ibid*.: 432). In a mischievous and profane reversal of adult/child, male/female, deity/human hierarchies, then, the children unwittingly preside over the physical degradation and death of the Authority himself.

Whilst undeniably provocative, a carnivalesque reading of this episode suggests something more complex than merely derogatory satire. As indicated above, the mocking reversals and grotesque imagery at the centre of carnival achieve a levelling effect by ‘lowering...all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract...to the sphere of earth and body’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 20). This laughing liberation ‘from the heavy chains of devout seriousness’ (*ibid*.: 83) and narrow official truths allows for greater freedom of thought and imagination: ‘[opens] men’s eyes on that which is new, on the future’ (*ibid*.: 94). In carnival, then, mockery and degradation simultaneously herald the positive and the new. So, rather than compromising the narrative simply to make an ‘anti-theological point’ (Jacobs, 2000), as Jacobs, Grenier (2001) and others suggest, God’s elimination, in this context, can be read as a significant plot event; indeed, it turns out to be a necessary precursor to the positive re-enactment of Edenic myth. As Mary Harris Russell notes in her essay on Pullman’s Eve: ‘when the new Eve is ready for the new creation, built on the truth, the old Authority, built on a lie, must vanish’ (2005: 159). Lyra’s temptation of Will and their joyous physical congress, mark a contextually subversive transition to adulthood which stalls universal destruction and instigates the new order. This is an environmentally ethical system originating

in and sustained by 'Dust', an amorphous, multifunctional substance which as Anne-Marie Bird points out, forces the reader 'to enter into an endless play of contradictions and multiple meanings as regards...[its] precise nature and function' (2005: 196). Far from being uncompromisingly atheistic or secular, then, Pullman's biblical revisions have an ambivalent and dialogic quality which opens them to alternative theological accounts. Harris Russell (2005), for instance, aligns Pullman's re-imagined *Genesis* to interpretations found in the early non-canonical writings of both Hebrew and Christian authors. In a number of these variations 'the Lord of Creation is often viewed as tyrannical, and...Eve's rebellion against him is seen as reasonable' (Evans in Russell, 2005: 214). The ex-archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams (2004) and Pat Pinsent (2005a), on the other hand, point to the interpretive possibilities of Pullman's concept Dust: 'the sense of glory pervading the environment, the beauty...is open to Christian theoria and Buddhist mindfulness' (Williams, 2004).

It cannot be denied that the empowered and sexually precocious young protagonists and parodic 'uncrownings' in *His Dark Materials* enact a radical and contextually contentious opposition to authoritarian religious narratives. Rather than indoctrinating the implied reader, however, Pullman's oppositional discourse works against passive acceptance of fixed or immutable truths. In this polyphonic alternative, competing secular and theological understandings are allowed to surface and prevail.

1.6. The Next Step: Why and How?

A Bakhtinian approach, then, foregrounds how Pullman's complex and literary narrative interrogates authoritarian religious discourses and, in doing so, empowers the reader and unsettles traditional categories of age and fictional genre. As Beckett notes in her comprehensive overview of 'crossover' works: 'Pullman's treatment of moral issues in *His Dark Materials* elevates…[it] above such clear-cut...categories as fantasy' children's text (2009: 259). For Pinsent (2005c), this complexity and reach is inevitably associated with the distanced

perspective of adulthood. In a discussion of teenage authored fiction, she suggests that whilst adolescents are capable of writing 'good' literature for their own age group, sophisticated and challenging works with broad audience appeal can only emerge from a more considered and reflective adult stance. Somewhat ironically, however, this 'distanced perspective' is also recognised as fostering 'anxieties' and inhibitions which simultaneously work to restrict or contain understandings when writing for or about the young: '[the adult author] may act to keep the teenager in check through essentially humanist and pedagogic urges' (Waller, 2009: 1). Whilst recognising that fiction for children and young adults has become more subversive and innovative - developed new and more radical 'forms and emphasis' since 'Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan*' (Stephens, 1999: 187-188) - for Stephens (1999), Waller (2009) and others, Rose's understandings still have something important to say 'about how texts speak to and about children that remains self-evidently true' (Stephens, 1999: 188). Responsible and self-conscious adult authors, they suggest, continue to acknowledge a conventional framework of constraints and to 'fix' childhood and adolescence in order 'to maintain their own sense of coherent selfhood' (Waller, 2009: 1). Karen Sánchez-Eppler (2011) confirms this view. In her essay on childhood, she notes the persistence of conventional understandings and attitudes in the face of challenges posed by constructionist scholarship and oppositional images emerging in a fast paced, multi-media world. In an echo of Rose (1992) and Jenks (1982), she views understandings of definitive childhood as a means by which to secure traditional power relationships and social norms:

> the sense of childhood as a ubiquitous and fundamental category of human life has proved remarkably resilient. Belief in the universal and unchanging essence of childhood can make all sorts of cultural arrangements and power structures appear natural. The configuration of the family and of gender roles, the socializing institutions of education, class and racial formations, literary and other forms of cultural production, national security, religious and sexual virtue all tout the needs of the child (2011: 35).

The link between age and socio-cultural perspectives in young adult[1] identity narratives, then, is clearly significant in crossover fiction a category which 'usually features protagonists...on the cusp between childhood and maturity' (Craig: www.amandacraig.com), and where the empowered adult writer seems inclined to reflect the ideological assumptions and understandings which mark out children's from adults' texts. Given Stephens' observation that these issues have most significance in the contemporary realist mode and that 'the boundary in some fantasy subgenres' can be more 'blurred' (1999: 185), the influence of genre is also important in this context too. Simon Gilson (2003), Pinsent (2006) and many more, for instance, associate crossover fiction with the potential breadth and scope offered in fantasy modes. On the other hand, Reynolds suggests that the increasingly explicit sexual content in teenage realist novels breaches a significant taboo: 'what was once one of the most vigorously patrolled boundaries separating fiction for adults from that for juveniles has been redrawn' (2007: 115).

With these considerations in mind, the focus for this study will be on 'generational' representations of identity and child/adolescent experience within the context of genre. Chapters, accordingly, will be organised by genre[2] and include a comparative analysis of texts by both adult and teenage authors writing in similar modes. Employing Bakhtinian concepts, I shall assess how effectively carnivalesque disruptions and reversals challenge dominant discourses of family, gender, sexuality, race and so on, in the context of age category and literary type. As in Stephens' (1992) account, radically interrogative potential will be determined by positioning each work on a continuum ranging from 'monologic' discourses, which ultimately contain or resolve expressed resistance, to 'dialogic' narratives such as that identified in Pullman's multi-voiced religious theme.

[1] The terms 'children', 'young adult' and 'teenager' may be understood as referencing publishing categories and in this context should be considered fluid rather than denoting specific or clearly defined age groups: 'Just as there is no age at which a child instantly becomes an adolescent...the flow from children's lit to YA lit doesn't divide itself neatly into specific age ranges' (www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org, 2011). In line with much secondary analyses referenced, the term 'children' in this study, will on occasion be used to encompass all those who might be socially/culturally positioned as in the pre-adult stage.

[2]A working definition will be provided within each section but this is not intended to be an exact 'instrument...of classification or prescription, but of meaning' (Fowler in Waller, 2009: 11). As Waller points out, the process of distinguishing genres 'is a useful tool for noting significant trends in the field...differences are relevant to how texts can be understood and how placed in their wider context' (2009: 11).

Comparison between adult and teenage authored fictions within each chapter will foreground generational perspectives indicated by each work's content, form, style of presentation, address and so on, before considering how this impacts on reader positioning and audience reach.

1.7. Rationale: Authors and Texts

To represent the 'distanced' perspective, I have chosen works produced by accomplished adult authors of thirty years or older at the time of writing their works and thus some distance removed from young adult experience themselves. The five authors in this category have established a reputation for challenging or subverting the conventions marking off children's from adults' texts, and their novels are significant exemplars of 'dual audience' fiction in different generic modes. Almond, like Pullman, for instance, is identified by Beckett (2009), Falconer (2009) and others as a major player in the crossover phenomenon: '[Almond's] unique blend of spirituality and gritty, urban realism...has great appeal for adults as well as young readers' (Beckett, 2009: 268). Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), on the other hand, 'brought home the point that realist fiction...could [also] cross' readership categories (Falconer, 2009: 95).

In socio-cultural terms, the group representing the 'near' perspective can be described as 'pre-adult' authors. All were teenagers in the school/education system when writing the focus texts and, as a consequence, were of or close to the age of the protagonists they portray in their works. In common with the adult authors, their novels have generated comment and praise for the challenge they pose to conventions of age category and genre. Guène's satirical, socio-cultural critique *Just Like Tomorrow*, for instance, has been celebrated for its broad audience appeal (Burke, 2006). Catherine Banner's unsettling and unconventional, character-driven fantasy texts have similarly troubled the readership divide; marketed for young adults in Britain, her works are targeted at an older readership in Germany: 'Some of my publishers have seen the book as

crossover or adult fiction, some as young adult books' (Banner in French, 2010). Although less subject to academic analyses, the five young authors in the teenage group have achieved a level of status and recognition intimated in their conventional publication and the subsequent media reviews.

The term 'crossover' as used in this study, then, will refer to fiction which crosses or blurs borderlines between two traditionally separate readerships by challenging conventions of content, presentation and/or style and form. Realist authors Melvin Burgess and Kody Keplinger, for example, challenge traditional age boundaries with their contentiously explicit portrayals of irresponsible teenage sex. Patrick Ness's dystopias like those of teenage author Isamu Fukui's, by contrast, provoke controversy for their graphic and contextually 'inappropriate' (Cox-Gurdon, 2011) representations of young adult violence and death. Although media analysis tends to categorise contemporary crossovers as children's books which appeal to adult readers, scholars recognise that such 'literature is not a one-sided phenomenon or a one-way border crossing' (Beckett, 2009: 5). My study, in fact, will include exemplars of works that have crossed in both directions. The texts chosen have been published, reviewed and/or recommended for the opposite category from which they were originally intended, either by the publishers or the authors themselves[3].

All writers are European and/or American, although they come from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. In contrast to the young authors, however, those in the adult category are all 'white'. This may be seen as generationally representative in that they reflect changing socio-cultural attitudes and the shifting demographics of a postcolonial, transmigrational age. Like Meek (2004) and others, Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman, for instance, points to the continuing paucity of books 'aimed at young children and young adults [which centre on]...characters from ethnic minorities' (in Green, 2014). The

[3] Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, for instance, although intended by the author himself for an adult readership was published simultaneously as both adults' and children's text (Beckett, 2009). On the other hand, teenage author Helen Oyeyemi's novel *The Icarus Girl*, despite being categorised by her publishers as adult fiction has proved popular with readers across the age range and generated a divided critical response. Whilst many critics review it as a challenging 'adult' novel, others insist its child protagonist's perspective positions it as a 'young adult' text.

predominance of multi-cultural protagonists in three of the five young authors' texts, then, is a potential trend warranting broader investigation than this study's generational emphasis will allow. That said, issues of race and cultural alienation will be analysed in Chapter Four where Almond's address of regional/cultural marginalisation and hybridity in *Clay* (2005/6) will be compared to Oyeyemi's exploration of fractured identity and mixed-heritage childhood in *The Icarus Girl* (2005). In order to achieve a comprehensive and relevant perspective, this chapter will incorporate postcolonial understandings closely linked to Bakhtinian notions of heterogeneity and carnivalesque degradation and rebirth. Because all writers in the adult group also happen to be men, mature and established female authors will be referenced to provide balance and comparison, most specifically, when assessing narratives of gender and identity in the fantasy and dystopian texts. Detailed analysis of Fukui's representations of gender and adolescent sexuality in his *Truancy* (2008-2012) series will likewise balance perspectives in the predominantly female young authors' group.

My investigations will begin in Chapter Two with an analysis of 'Other-worlds' fantasy texts, most specifically, representations of the 'hero' in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* and Banner's *The Eyes of a King* (2008) and *Voices in the Dark* (2009). The intention here is to establish whether the empowering potential this mode offers its young protagonists and implied readers is inevitably compromised by the inherently didactic fantasy quest frame. Drawing on Bakhtinian concepts of the 'carnivalesque fool' and associated notions of 'unfinalizability', I shall consider whether Banner's unselfconsciously disordered and unruly heroic discourse effects a more fundamental challenge to adult/child boundaries than Pullman's assuredly constructed quest narratives permit.

The currently popular and often contentious young adult dystopian/action genre will be examined in Chapter Three in order to establish whether it is, as suggested, a less inherently didactic young adult mode (Miller, 2010). Focus texts here will be Ness' *Chaos Walking* (2008-2010), a controversial series at the centre of the 'new wave', and teenage author Fukui's action-packed *Truancy* (2008-2012)

trilogy. Carnivalesque analysis of these works and others will foreground intertextual representations of young adult violence and death and assess what they offer in terms of relevancy and young adult empowerment. Consideration will be given as to whether this genre's dialogic engagement with new media offers opportunities for resistance to dominant norms and values less easily achieved in the classic fantasy mode, and whether this is particularly the case for the teenage writer growing up in this new media world.

As indicated, the final chapter on texts in the fantasy/mixed-fantasy category will comprise a study of Almond's award winning novel *Clay* and Oyeyemi's much praised debut *The Icarus Girl*. Grounded in the identifiably real, both stories incorporate elements of the fantastical or supernatural to explore themes of socio-cultural marginality and difference and, as a consequence, lend themselves to a postcolonial approach. This theory's focus on the 'impact of migrants on language and identity' (Robinson, 2011a) has particular significance for this chapter where I intend to explore the ways in which these authors articulate identity in the face of their own culturally marginalized origins. Comparative analysis of their texts will foreground the impact of each writer's chronological/emotional positioning in relation to these 'othered' origins. With this in mind, Bakhtinian concepts of heterogeneity and emphasis on physical degradation and renewal will be linked to postcolonial narratives of hybridity and healing return. This analysis will consider whether the embrace of 'other' identified in these authors' works gives rise to new kinds of crossover through the creation of hybrid narrative styles and forms.

Contested issues of 'authenticity' in contemporary young adult realism will be explored in Chapter Five. This will begin by assessing how effectively the carnivalesque imagery and terminology or 'language of the marketplace' (Bakhtin, 1984) employed in Burgess's novel *Doing It* (2003) and teenage author Keplinger's *The Duff* (2010/2012) disrupt traditional young adult narratives of teenage sexuality. Through points of comparison and contrast, I shall consider whether Keplinger's carnivalized representations, although less obviously shocking, offer a more plausible and empowering account than the grotesque

language and imagery employed in Burgess' narrative. The second half of this chapter will focus on themes of social and emotional isolation imagined in Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Guène's *Just Like Tomorrow*. A carnivalesque perspective here will determine whether these narratives offer a more sophisticated challenge to readership boundaries than the radically revised teenage romance texts. The ultimate aim in this section is to establish whether young adult realism, however challenging its themes, is able to offer the broad audience appeal more commonly associated with the scope and reach of fantasy/mixed-fantasy modes.

An analysis of my findings in the Conclusion is expected to confirm that broad readership appeal, in fact, can arise through a variety of narrative genres and forms and regardless of authorial age, but that generational perspectives may significantly influence the type of crossover text produced. That is, although generally less sophisticated, the young authors' near perspectives and fresh approach move beyond the much hailed crossing of child/adult readership boundaries identified in the adult authored works. As a consequence, their hybrid crossover fictions promise an exciting new departure in the field of young adult literature.

Chapter 2: Blurring Boundaries: Romantic/Heroic Quest Narratives in Other Worlds Fantasy texts

2.1. Narratives of Development

In the above case study I argued that far from 'indoctrinating' the reader with anti-religious propaganda, carnivalesque contraventions and disruptions in *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) encourage a plural and interrogative response which militates against unitary readings and the passive understandings Pullman's critics take for granted in young readers. This inducement to an active and imaginative response inevitably unsettles Jacqueline Rose's (1984/1992) identification of children's literature as 'a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver) but where neither of them enter the space in between' (1992: 2). On the contrary, Bakhtinian analysis suggests an altogether more democratic and interactive relationship between author, text and reader is required. Indeed, David Rudd (2004: 37) argues that such is the dialogic nature of language that even in the most unitary of texts some element of this 'co-authorship' is inevitable. Quoting Volosinov (1973) he suggests that 'the word constitutes a "border zone", in which the addressees - children in this case – orient themselves precisely in the way that they "lay down" their own set of answering words'. So, for him any attempt to avoid hybrid contamination is fated: 'it refuses to mean just what the author intends' (Rudd, 2004: 38) and it is, in part, the growing recognition of this loss of control that has led to the increase in hybrid texts where 'many see a blurring of boundaries between adult and child literatures' (*ibid.*).

This would certainly seem to be borne out in *His Dark Materials*. Recipient of prestigious literary awards, both children's and adult's, this critically acclaimed best seller attracts readers of all ages and is seen by many to trouble the borders between adult and children's fiction. Despite this open appeal, however, I intend

to argue that it remains firmly within the category of children's/young adults' fiction because, alongside the complex, radical and interrogative content, there is manifested throughout the text a pervasive and didactic authorial presence, an 'adult' awareness of, and sense of responsibility towards, a younger audience. Barbara Wall identifies this distinction in her analysis of children's literature: 'adults whether or not they are speaking ironically, speak differently in fiction when they are aware that they are addressing children' (1991: 2). Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer (2003), too, note a self-consciousness resulting from the adult writer's assumptions about what is good or appropriate in writing for children, which is manifest in even the most radical of texts. Indeed, they point out that the modern category of children's literature 'wouldn't exist at all if adults didn't see children as inexperienced and in need of knowledge' and for this reason it 'is almost always didactic: its purpose is to instruct' (2003: 198). This drive to instruct is not to be confused with the 'soliciting' or 'seduction' Rose (1992) observes; rather, it is one which 'assumes the inexperience of its readers but not their inability to develop greater understanding' and thus 'allows for more complex understandings' (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003: 100).

So, rather than attempting to 'take the child *in*' (Rose, 1992: 2), radical texts such as Pullman's seek to distance and empower the reader. In Pullman's case, this results in a narrative which is unafraid to address the 'great questions of existence: life, death, morality and humanity's role in the universe' (Miller, 2007: 1), and for Pat Pinsent (2006) the employment of fantasy is significant in this respect. In her examination of spirituality and religion in contemporary fantasy for young readers, she argues that fantasy is the 'form of fiction with the greatest potential for presenting children with the opportunity to encounter such things as death and the nature of the universe without being strongly involved' (2006: 52). As suggested by the critical response to *His Dark Materials* and others in this genre, including my own, this fearless address of the 'great questions of existence' broadens knowledge and, inevitably, widens audience appeal. At the same time,

however, the responsible adult perspective, taken for granted in Pinsent's observations, signals a 'distance' which, I shall argue, works to limit and restrict understandings in representations of youthful experience and growth.

In this chapter, I shall identify the impact of these constraints in Pullman's romantic/heroic quest narratives (familiar tropes of development in young adult fantasy) and consider the implications of differences which occur when the conventional adult author/child reader power asymmetry is disturbed. This will be achieved by comparing *His Dark Materials* with work produced by teenagers now writing and publishing in the fantasy genre, most specifically Catherine Banner's *The Eyes of a King* (2008) and *Voices in the Dark* (2009). In common with Pullman's texts, Banner's novels incorporate 'realist' content and style into the metaphorical mode of 'other worlds' fantasy. Unlike the more securely positioned and often derivative work of some of her contemporaries, I shall conclude that Banner' carnivalizations enact a distinct, and ultimately significant, challenge to generic convention that Pullman's texts do not.

2.2. Paradise Lost

In *His Dark Materials* the young protagonists' progress from innocence to experience culminates in the transgressively re-imagined 'Fall' in which Will and Lyra's passionate physical expressions of their love for each other stalls the environmental disaster that threatens all living things. Their joyous transition into adulthood clearly represents a carnivalesque breach of religious and social conventions and the literature which reflects them. In 'From "Capping" to Intercision: Metaphors/Metonyms of Mind Control in the Young Adult Fiction of John Christopher and Philip Pullman', for instance, Clare Walsh notes that Pullman, like Blake, 'writes *against* the tendency amongst children's authors, especially but not exclusively amongst writers of traditional children's fantasy, to deny their young protagonists the right to move beyond the safe but circumscribed world of childhood innocence' (2003: 241). Whilst subversive in content and theme, however, Pullman's awareness of and responsibility towards his youthful

audience is clearly evident. Will and Lyra's sexual initiation is, after all, no casual or promiscuous affair. The protagonists' commitment to one another is carefully established and the seriousness and significance of their actions foregrounded; their encounter marks the consummation of a deeply felt and mutual love and respect that has developed between them over a significant period of time, at the end of which they are carefully prepared for sensual awakening by caring adult mentor, Mary Malone. And, whilst a subversive carnivalesque emphasis on the physical leaves little doubt that sexual knowing precedes their entry into adulthood, the scene itself is discreetly imagined: an idealised encounter in an idyllic setting.

In his radical opposition to conventional notions of innocence, then, Pullman clearly demonstrates an 'adult' sensitivity and sense of responsibility towards his younger readers. The children's 'natural' and unforced delight in sexuality represents a transgressive notion of innocence but one tempered by more conventional social/moral values. These values are reinforced in their subsequent parting: in order to secure the survival of the universe, Will and Lyra are compelled to choose permanent separation. So, the children's transgressive journey to adulthood, as a number of commentators point out, carries with it the lesson:

> ...that being grown up requires struggle, self-discipline and a certain admixture of heartache and melancholy. It's not all adventure and excitement, and few things come easily. And it requires that one cease to be self-absorbed, and to care about others and the common good (Moloney, 2005: 184).

Although painful, Pullman's empowered young characters are carefully and thoughtfully equipped with the skills, knowledge and power they need to deal with their transition to adulthood and to 'regain paradise', through a sustained and responsible quest for knowledge. Both 'children' ultimately acknowledge that they must build the 'republic of heaven' in their own lives and 'that where we are is always the most important place' (Pullman, 2000: 548).

So, Will and Lyra's adventure ends with a poignant and difficult, but nevertheless positive, transition into adulthood. This challenges the negative resistance Pullman identifies in C.S. Lewis's 'Tales of Narnia' (1950-1956), and, at the same time, stands in opposition to the fixed asexual fantasy child of Rose's analysis. On the other hand, the romanticisation of their encounter, and the sense of lost innocence implied by their transition, carries with it traces of the nostalgia Rose identifies in adult representations of childhood. As the anguished young lovers prepare to enter their separate adult worlds Will reassures Lyra that they can regain 'paradise': 'D'you remember…[what] he said, my father? He said we have to rebuild the republic of heaven where we are…I thought he just meant Lord Asriel and his new world but he meant us, he meant you and me' (Pullman, 2000: 516). Most significantly for this analysis, their acknowledged progression, from one state to another, from 'innocence' to 'experience', reiterates an understanding of childhood as 'part of a strict developmental sequence…Children may be disturbed but they do not disturb us as long as that sequence (and that development) can be ensured' (Rose, 1992: 13). For this reason, Rose identifies the 'journey metaphor' as 'a recurrent one', and in her analysis of *His Dark Materials* Susan Matthews observes and approves Pullman's use of the metaphor: 'The trilogy rereads Blake's multiple, worrying, and often contradictory narratives into a single linear narrative…that maps the move from innocence to experience onto the process of growing up. This reading is of course appropriate to a novel for children' (2005: 134).

The teenage author Banner, by contrast, appears to make no such assumption about appropriateness in her fantasy novel *The Eyes of a King*. In this disrupted and piecemeal narrative, the boundaries between adulthood and childhood are far from distinct and mark no clearly defined or 'linear' journey from 'innocence' to 'experience'. This, to some extent at least, is inevitable, given that Banner's protagonists, unlike Pullman's, are already troubled teenagers when their adventures begin and, in this sense, can be more readily aligned to the young adult texts Kimberley Reynolds identifies as featuring 'characters caught up in the turbulent and complex emotions associated with teenage years and concerns, as

distinct from those associated with adulthood and childhood' (2007: 72). This distinction is also pointed up by Alison Waller in *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, where she notes adolescence is not merely 'other' to adulthood but also 'other to childhood' (2009: 6). As a consequence, these stories are not mapping the journey from 'innocence' that Matthews identifies in Pullman's work. Nevertheless, development and progress remain central themes in such books: 'Adolescence is represented as a minor stage in the process of becoming adult, whole and empowered within appropriate parameters' (*ibid*.: 196). In the young adult fantasy genre this development is frequently expressed metaphorically through the central heroic quest.

Mikhail Bakhtin's understandings are perhaps significant here, as for him traditional heroic romance, is a characteristically authoritarian and didactic mode: discourse of the powerful and cultured 'Chivalry regulates the whole of life and love by codes of conduct, such as courtly love which regulates contact (even illicit contact) between the sexes, the chivalric code which regulates war…and the good manners which regulate social contact' (Higher Education Academy, http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk). Pinsent, for example, in her analysis of Robert Swindells' and Marjorie Blackman's dystopian fantasies for young adults, *Daz4Zoe* (1990) and *Noughts and Crosses* (2001), highlights their didactic deployment of romantic quest which in its oldest form is 'usually concerned with the world of court and involving quests, heroic deeds, the separation and reuniting of lovers...and often elements of the supernatural' to confront 'contemporary social problems' (2005b: 195). The transgressive quest narratives in these texts, like Pullman's, track a journey to adulthood which undeniably challenges literary, social and religious conventions but which is, nevertheless, contained within each author's morally responsible frame: 'Blackman and Swindells are adults writing for a younger audience, and as writers, they almost inevitably espouse middle-class values, a situation of some complexity concerning their positioning as implied authors' (*ibid*.: 197). Banner's youthful viewpoint and less conventional

stylist writing style, by contrast, lead to a less mediated and/or structured approach, and I shall argue that, as a consequence, her quest narratives express a far more radical and subversive opposition to chivalric patterns and ideals.

2.3. Romance: Trouble in Paradise

The first adolescent encountered in *The Eyes of a King* is the narrator Leo North, a rebellious fifteen year old living in the world of Malonia, a troubled military state on the brink of revolution. His discovery of a strange and mysterious book in which words suddenly begin to appear introduces the fragmented story of an elderly magician Alderban and the second young male protagonist, Alderbaran's protégé Ryan, with whom he is exiled in 'England'. The young heroes, in the tradition of much modern fantasy which 'draws heavily upon many of the early forms of romance' (Clute & Grant, 1997: 820) simultaneously meet and fall in love with the texts' youthful heroines.

A traditional romance is promised in Malonia when the rebellious and handsome Leo first encounters teenage protagonist Maria. In an echo of Shakespeare's Romeo, he is dramatically struck by his future love's great physical beauty:

> As she came closer, the light from the doorway shadowed her long eyelashes into spider-leg patterns on her cheeks. The jewels in her ears were expensive, but they did not make her look plain…There was something about her mouth that made me want to look at it. It was perfect. (Banner, 2008: 56).

Carnivalesque style disruptions, however, have already begun to compromise the traditionally romantic allusions, as only seconds before it takes place, Leo tells us: 'Nausea bubbled in my throat. I bent over sharply, retching, and my stomach stabbed' (*ibid*.: 55), and is in such a weak and dishevelled state, 'as I passed the mirror, I saw that there was mud in my hair and on the side of my uniform, and my face was still yellowish' (*ibid*.), that he has to be escorted to the grimy and unkempt communally shared bathroom, situated in the yard of the flats where they live, by his eight year old brother Stirling. Further disturbances occur when we discover that the conventionally idealised female 'other' to whom he refers, the

metaphorical ‘princess in the tower’ - she has just moved into the ‘top apartment’ and Stirling later describes her as being like a ‘princess’ (*ibid*.: 62) - turns out to be a rather more down-to-earth and identifiably real single mother struggling to care for an interminably wailing and grizzling baby called Anselm. When she recognises Leo’s weak and sickly condition, Maria firmly directs him, against his inclination and to his increasing embarrassment, to use the bathroom first: ‘The quicker you get back to bed, the better’ (*ibid*.: 57), before providing physical support and reassurance as she helps him back to his flat: ‘“I won’t let you fall,” she said. She was strong…I was painfully aware of her fingers, tight on my ribs, and her side, pressed right against mine’ (*ibid*.: 60). Elements of Bakhtin’s ‘grotesque’, then, with its emphasis on the ‘lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly, the reproductive organs’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 21), playfully undermine the traditional romantic bearings of Leo and Maria’s initial encounter and, indeed, go on to frame many of their subsequent meetings. When Maria first calls on Leo, for instance, she is wearing a dressing gown, because ‘Anselm threw up on my clothes’ (Banner, 2008: 70). Some weeks later ‘Maria comes into the yard’ as Leo, on his grandmother’s orders, is ‘Pouring vomit’ from his brother’s sick bucket ‘into the drain’. Mildly amused by his angry disgruntlement, the practical Maria directs the emotional, exhausted and recalcitrant Leo: ‘She came over and took the bucket from me. It was reasonably clean, except for a tide mark of yellow scum…She put her hand to my face and pushed my hair back from my forehead… “Try to get some rest” she said’ (*ibid*.: 193). In these circumstances, idealised romantic readings of their developing relationship are rapidly dispelled. Leo confesses, ‘I hardly even noticed how pretty she [Maria] was any more’ (*ibid*.), an unconventional and unsettling equivocation that lingers throughout the texts.

Carnivalesque disruptions and reversals, then, mock chivalric ideals which ‘idealise the body of lover and beloved’ (Higher Education Academy, http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk) and by placing Maria in a position of physical/emotional authority, laughingly undermine some of the masculinist suppositions about romantic quests. Although an altogether less subversive text, elements of this kind of bathetic carnivalization can also be identified in teenage

author Christopher Paolini's fantasy *Eragon* (2005) when the male hero of the title finds himself mentally and physically 'bested' on more than one occasion, by the beautiful romantic heroine, an elf princess called Arya:

> ...Arya nimbly sidestepped, sweeping the point of her sword up to his jawbone with supernatural speed...Eragon froze as the icy metal touched his skin. His muscles trembled from the exertion...Arya lowered her sword and sheathed it. "You have passed," she said quietly amid the noise.
> Dazed, he slowly straightened....*But I lost*, he protested silently (*Eragon*, 2007: 460).

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that unconventional heroines/heroes, reflecting more contemporary notions of gender, have begun to emerge in even the traditionally patriarchal heroic-fantasy mode. As indicated in Chapter One, Pullman's re-imagining of Eve as an empowered young action heroine enacts a similarly subversive opposition, in her case to patriarchal religious hierarchies, as well as action quest norms. As Millicent Lenz observes in her analysis of Pullman's work: 'Lyra's quest shares most features of the traditionally male pattern' (2001: 154) which is something Banner's heroine, in many respects, does not: Maria, after all, remains in the domestic sphere whilst Leo embarks on his action adventure. Lyra and Will, on the other hand, have what Riane Eisler (1987) might call a 'partnership' quest, in which the male and female share equally (in Lenz, 2001: 154). Nevertheless, in contrast to the young authors' imagined romances, we find that within this 'equal' partnership, somewhat more traditional chivalric alignments and patterns prevail.

Will and Lyra first meet in Book Two of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife* (1997/1998). In a reversal of Leo and Maria's first encounter, Will, from the start, assumes an authoritative position by dint of his superior physical status, and greater maturity. After Lyra's easily deflected physical assault on him, they begin to talk. He leads the conversation by asking most of the questions and subsequently takes control of the situation by organising and subduing the spirited and impractical Lyra who 'seems quite willing to take orders' (Pullman, 1998: 25). Indeed, in the events which follow, she comes to respect and even fear Will's authority 'she fell silent. Will was just looking at her, and she quailed..."I never heard anything so stupid in my life," he said..."You need to think."' (*ibid*.: 166).

In direct contrast to Banner's, and indeed, Paolini's representations, then, the emotional and recalcitrant heroine Lyra is frequently led, guided and, of course, rescued by the rational and logical male hero Will: 'I'm only going to do what you ask from now on' (*ibid*.: 233). The children's developing relationship and increasing affection thus mark the move towards more conventionally gendered adult roles. Lyra, for example, initially a coarse and insensitive 'tom boy', ultimately becomes a thoughtful, caring and nurturing young woman. When Will is horribly injured by the Subtle Knife, after stepping 'up the lead' to defend himself, Lyra and the 'old man' (*ibid*.: 182), she tenderly nurses him: her daemon 'gazing up at him with melting, sorrowing eyes...gently licked Will's wounded hand, again and again and laid his head on Will's knee once more' (*ibid*.: 191). And some time later, Lyra develops 'a wish in her heart to have a child of her own, to lull and soothe and sing to, one day' (Pullman, 2000: 292).

These somewhat stereotypical oppositions are echoed in romantic relationships throughout the texts. When captured and imprisoned in the Adamant Tower, for instance, the beautiful and powerful Mrs Coulter, 'bound to a chair, her hair dishevelled, her clothing torn, her eyes wild', rails against her cool and impassive captor Asriel before she is forced to submit to his authority '"No, no," she said, "Asriel, don't, I beg you, please don't humiliate me"' (*ibid*.: 212). Although she makes a wily and dramatic escape from captivity soon after, it is one that has been anticipated by Asriel and which he is happy to 'allow'. As she makes her getaway the unperturbed and amused romantic hero reassures his concerned companion, King Ogunwe:

> 'I know exactly what she'll do: she'll go to the Consistorial Court, and give them the intention craft as an earnest of good faith, and then she'll spy on them…And as soon as she finds out where the girl is, she'll go there, and we'll follow'….
> 'And when will Lord Roke let her know he's come with her?'
> 'Oh, I think he'll keep that a surprise, don't you?'
> They laughed, and moved back into the workshops, where a later more advanced model of the intention craft was awaiting inspection (Pullman, 2000: 232).

Like Will, Asriel is required to heroically rescue his defiant and feisty lover when she becomes embroiled in a life and death battle with the forces of the

Consistorial Court: 'Asriel...lifted her in his arms and carried her to the craft, ignoring the gunfire…[he] moved the craft unhurriedly away, and they watched as the blazing zeppelin fell slowly…down on top of the whole scene' (*ibid*.: 369). At the subsequent council of war, we discover a romantically transformed Mrs Coulter lying contentedly 'in Lord Asriel's bed next door' (*ibid*.: 399). As the final plans of battle are agreed, we are told that this ruthlessly ambitious, highly political and predatory femme fatale 'didn't want to move closer to the door; it was simply the sound of Lord Asriel's voice she wanted to hear more than any particular words' (*ibid*.).

In the tradition of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, then, willing female submission is achieved and conventional 'romantic' hierarchy and chivalric ideals restored; Mrs Coulter, like her daughter, in the end, is contained or 'tamed' by romantic and maternal love. Even the powerful and sexually liberated witch-leader, Serafina Pekala, 'there are men who serve us…men we take for lovers and husbands' (Pullman, 2000*:* 314), confesses to Lyra her yearning for domestic bliss: 'I loved him [Farder Coram] once. I would have changed my nature, I would have forsaken the star-tingle and the music of the Aurora...I would have given all that up in a moment...to be a gyptian boat-wife and cook for him...and bear his children' (*ibid*.: 315). So, at the same time as representing a radical acknowledgement of female power and sexuality, Pullman's romantic conformity might be said to celebrate a number of essentialist male/female qualities which ultimately position his heroic protagonists in somewhat traditional adult roles.

The mocking inversions and self-conscious allusions identified in Leo and Maria's, and Eragon and Arya's carnivalized romances, on the other hand, laughingly undermine these idealisations, and, by foregrounding the discursively constructed source of such roles, encourage the reader to question assumptions of an appropriate or unquestionably 'natural' male/female self. However, it is in Banner's more authentically challenging fantasy that we see mischievous interrogation become a radically unsettling and overtly expressed critique. This occurs when Maria recounts the circumstances surrounding Anselm's conception:

an ironically romanticised encounter with the powerful government official Ahira. In stark contrast to Mary Malone's account of sweetly innocent sensual awakening, and Will and Lyra's radically physical, but discreetly romanticised sexual initiation, Maria's experience is one of grotesque degradation.

> I met him at a ball…We danced together…I didn't consider who he was or whether I liked him. I just liked dancing. And he led me out of the ballroom, and I just thought we were going onto the balcony. And I went along with it, because I liked the way he looked at me, like he really loved me…And he led me further, away from all the guests, and I knew why – of course I did. I must have done. And he took me to his bedroom. I should have just run away, but I was afraid because he was so important. An important man in government…And anyway, I thought maybe I loved him. I was quite wild. Several boys had asked me to marry them, and I'd come close to it with some of them. But it's different with boys of your own age (Banner, 2007: 388).

In this scene we see Maria's accurate understanding of the situation displaced by the insistently powerful discourse of 'romance'. Enchanted and excited by the fairy-tale like setting of the ballroom and the attentions of a powerful and assertive older male, Maria disastrously imposes an idealised reading on her own clearly perceived reality. So, although she 'knew why' he led her to his bedroom, she does not take the opportunity to 'run away'. Instead, she pretends that she 'didn't realise what he was thinking', because 'l liked the way he looked at me, like he really loved me…And anyway, I thought maybe I loved him'. The consequences of Maria's 'fall', in the context of young adult fiction, are predictably negative: she and her family lose their wealth and status, whilst she is forced to confront the difficulties of single parenthood. However, in contrast to the repressive adult narratives Roberta Trites (2000: 92) and others note in young adult romance, the self-consciously intertextual nature of this episode emphasizes that Maria's misfortunes do not arise as a consequence of any dangerous and uncontrolled teenage or 'female' sexuality, but perhaps more revealingly from the contesting 'adult' romanticisation of teenage sex. That is, influenced by adult idealisations of youthful romance, Maria wilfully suppresses her active and sexually knowing 'realistic' stance - which up to this point has proved harmlessly empowering - in favour of chivalric naïvety and submission. Banner's carnivalizations, then, force into the open some of the more unpalatable

oppressions that romanticised notions of first love can mask. Because Maria surrenders to 'male' authority and the narratives that reinforce it: 'the hero myth inscribes male dominance' (Hourihan, 1997: 68), she finds herself quite literally subjected to and silenced by 'romantic' love: 'I realised it was a terrible mistake. I was too scared to say anything…it was too late and he wouldn't listen even when I did' (Banner, 2008: 388).

Intrusions of the grotesque and uncomfortably real, then, by disrupting chivalric patterns and conventions not only challenge, but radically critique romance discourse itself. In this respect, Maria's encounter with Ahira might be more readily aligned with the less idealised accounts of teenage sexual relations imagined in young adult dystopias. Sephy's sexual initiation in Blackman's gritty fantasy *Noughts and Crosses*, for instance, is similarly infiltrated by aspects of the grotesque. The young heroine in this story is cruelly betrayed by her 'one true love' Callum when he lures her into violent kidnap and imprisonment. Pressurised by the militia gang of which he has become a member, he then humiliates and physically injures his 'victim' Sephy: 'I grabbed her left hand and before she could pull it away, I drew my knife across her index finger' (Blackman, 2006: 365). Although discomfortingly brutal and occurring in a far from 'idealised' setting, however, Sephy's romance, in the end, is a recognisably heroic one, as the embittered and brutalised Callum's innate morality and long-term love for his spirited heroine does finally triumph. Before, he 'enables' her daring escape, their long-term friendship is confirmed in a mutually passionate and respectful physical consummation: 'He lay me down gently, his hands and lips exploring my body…I *let myself drift away, following wherever Callum led*' (*ibid*.: 383, my italics). As in *His Dark Materials*, then, we find transgressive romance and transition tempered by more conventional chivalric values and ideals which are confirmed in the novel's tragi-romantic close: Sephy and Callum individually refuse bribes to halt Callum's impending execution in order to protect the life and status of their unborn child.

Unredeemed by heroic rescues or chivalric notions of honour, loyalty and love, Maria's humiliating encounter with Ahira, by contrast, is an altogether more uncertain and unconventionally irresolute affair which carries no clear 'lesson' or moral direction for the reader. Far from signifying symbolically significant transition from sexual innocence or morally edifying movement into appropriately gendered adulthood, this episode propels Maria, against her own volition, into a world of exhausting and disruptive maternal responsibilities. In her uncertain adult world contradictory emotions and understandings continue to prevail towards un-idealised motherhood: 'It's a lot of work caring for a baby...I get bored with it' (*ibid*: 67), and perhaps most controversially, towards Ahira himself. After revealing the details of Anselm's conception to her reluctant listener Leo, she confesses: 'I thought I'd got over all this, but then…I heard that Anselm's father was dead, and now I'm so confused I don't know what to think…I feel almost as if I loved him, and I feel guilty for not marrying him, but I don't know why. I hated him' (*ibid*: 389). Many years later, in Book Two of the trilogy, the teenage Anselm, recalls discovering his mother crying: 'I thought it was the war...But instead she shook her head and said, "This was the day your real father died" ' (Banner, 2009: 67). This emotional and moral confusion is emphasized by access to the abuser's own account of the event, expressed in a remorseful letter read some years later by his son: 'I want you to know that I am sorry. For the actions I have done in the name of government and for the wrongs I did your mother...Anselm, I would have loved you if I had seen you. I would have tried to make amends' (*ibid*.: 328).

Banner's grotesquely corrupted and, in the context of young-adult fantasy, incongruously travestied 'romance', generates an unsettling and controversial tension. As already noted, this echoes uncomfortably even in the texts' more conventionally reciprocal young-love romance. Soon after acknowledging Maria's importance in his life, at end of Book One, for instance, Leo reluctantly picks up her crying baby, Anselm: 'I could hardly stand it. But she was busy in the kitchen...there was no one else to take him. So I did not let him fall. Is that how you put your life back together? Because you have no choice about it, in the end'

(Banner, 2008: 405). And although following a more predictable romantic trajectory, the 'fairy tale' like relationship that develops in the parallel world of 'England' between the exiled Prince Ryan/Cassius and the poor working girl Anna, ultimately, proves equally compromised.

In common with Pullman's and Blackman's young protagonists, this teenage couple's commitment and loyalty to one another is foregrounded throughout the first novel before culminating in willing and consensual sexual union, in this case, initiated by Anna, on the eve of Ryan's return to Malonia. As in the older authors' texts, the anticipated 'happy ever after' ending is unexpectedly denied. Although joyfully accepting Ryan's proposal of marriage 'in the darkness when everything had been enchanted' (Banner, 2008: 395), Anna begins to have doubts in the morning after she 'wakes up'. In the cold light of day, she has time to consider the implications of her consent and unlike Maria decides to resist the enticements of her 'fairy tale' love:

> 'I thought you said you were going back home. How can you do that if you marry me?' She stopped then. 'You mean come with you?'
> 'Yes, that's what I mean'…Why not? You have seen the city. You are part Malonian'…
> 'What would I do there?' she said…It's easy for you to think about going back Ryan…You are just taking up a place that is already there for you'…
> 'What - because I am the prince - the king? Because it is supposed to be my destiny?'…
> 'Only the other day you were telling me I had to be a dancer. Did you mean that?'
> 'You can dance anywhere, Anna.'
> 'That's not true. And everything I ever had is here. How could I leave to go to a place I don't even think of as real?' (*ibid*.: 397).

Anna's practical and unsentimental focus on the mundane and everyday, in effect, 'brings down-to-earth' and demystifies the idealisations of her lover's romantic discourse: 'Maybe you said you loved me and never meant it,' he said...'But where I come from, if you love someone and tell her so, she doesn't become just some girl you left behind. You stay together and are never parted. Not for anything' (*ibid*.: 398).

Although poignant, however, the lovers' decision to part cannot, in the end, be likened to the tragi-romantic denouements offered in either Pullman's realist-fantasy or Blackman's fantasy dystopian accounts. In contrast to the selflessly moral and life-preserving necessity of their protagonists' heartbreaking separations, Anna's decision to stay with friends and family in England is a somewhat prosaic one which she hopes will allow her to pursue her ambition as a professional dancer. Ryan's determination to return to Malonia, on the other hand, is fuelled by less than convincing notions of duty and an abiding sense of homesickness. Somewhat ironically only seconds after leaving her, the ardent and earnestly romantic young prince, 'Come with me. My heart will break' (*ibid*.: 397) seems to forget his 'true love': 'Ryan had wanted to turn back because he had thought that he heard Anna calling after him. But a moment later he had stopped thinking about that' (*ibid*.: 402). This unromantic ambivalence is reinforced in the novel's closing pages. In a transitory dreamlike return several years later he is briefly reunited with Anna and her young son, whom he recognises as his own. Alongside expressions of regret for the 'way' they parted, the unconventionally irresolute prince confesses, 'I meant to come back but I started to forget this place' (*ibid*.: 426). As in the texts other (anti)romances, then, love in Banner's stories is not unambiguous, is not assured or forever and does not conquer all.

This is confirmed, in Banner's sequel novel *Voices in the Dark*, where Anna's, conventionally expressed loyalty and longing for her 'lost love' is challenged by a discordant and contesting 'realist' discourse of uncertainty and doubt, which echoes Ryan's own. When her inquisitive son Ashley asks if she loves his father, for instance, she declares: 'if there was some way we could find him, if there was some way we could be together, I would take it…yes I loved him' (Banner, 2009: 131). This straightforwardly romantic sentiment, however, is somewhat compromised by the following cautionary remark: 'Love is not a good thing…because it makes you forget about everything else' (*ibid*.: 131) and by Anna's subsequent reluctance to seek out reconciliation. Indeed, she actively resists a reunion for both herself and her son. When, some years later, the teenage

Ashley asks his mother whether she still loves his father, she replies 'yes…I think so. As much as I loved anyone' (*ibid*.: 345). This ambiguously hesitant response, is followed by an emphatic refusal of Ashley's suggestion that she 'find some way' back to her love:

> 'Anna shook her head. Ashley watched her:
> 'Can I go back there?' he said,
> 'No,' said Anna. 'No you can't.'
> 'Couldn't I go and look for him?'
> 'No, Ash' (*ibid*.: 346).

The double-voiced quality in the texts' earlier carnivalesque parodies and reversals, then, - which act 'in a hostile manner with the penetrated discourse' (Morris, 1994: 102) to interrogate romantic alignments and gender roles - becomes a disturbing discursive equivocation more readily likened to Bakhtin's (2004) 'hidden polemic'. This is defined as double-oriented discourse which 'serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions…there are 2 voices, 2 meanings and 2 expressions' (Bakhtin, 2004: 324). This unconventional ambiguity and irresolution inevitably unsettles the didactic linear narratives of development inscribed in more traditionally realised young-adult romance. Indeed, by identifying similar disturbances in Banner's heroic narrative, I intend to demonstrate, that the dialogic quality of her writing not only compromises instructive youthful progression, but ultimately destabilises the conventionally drawn literary distinctions between the youthful and adult self.

2.4. Heroes or Villains?: The Unfinalized Self

Leo's appearance and behaviour, in the opening pages of *The Eyes of a King*, as has been noted, is that which we might associate with the conventional fantasy hero of young adult fiction. Like Pullman's boy hero Will and his transgressive female hero Lyra, Leo is given orphan status, his parents live but are absent. And as might be expected in the context of young adult fantasy, he is rebellious, brave and fearless in his opposition to adult authority. He challenges his sinister and cruel school teacher Sergeant Markey and after draconian punishment for this, the

cause of his physical weakness when he encounters Maria, boldly defies official demands to go back to school. A further signifier of heroic status is Leo's access to extraordinary magical powers which, like Lyra's ability to use the alethiometer and Will's facility with the subtle knife, prepare readers for the familiar trope of young adult fantasy, the transforming heroic quest: 'during which the young hero is tried and tested in the manner of the ancient heroes of epic' (Bramwell, 2005: 141). This trial conventionally precedes the acquisition of 'an independent, autonomous' self (*ibid*.: 141). As in Banner's carnivalized romance narratives, however, intrusions of the identifiably real persistently trouble conventional understandings and, in this case, give us a disturbingly chaotic and unpredictable quest.

The first real 'test' for Banner's young hero comes when his endearing and loved younger brother Stirling becomes seriously ill. As well as care and concern, Leo's realistically imagined physical and emotional exhaustion, we have seen, results in a less than attractive bad-tempered recalcitrance. Alongside his fear and concern, the reader is also witness to his recurringly cruel lapses of compassion. When Stirling's illness is confirmed as the life threatening 'silent fever', Leo recalls: 'Why was I not crying? All I felt was selfish disappointment that just when I thought everything was perfect, this had happened' (Banner, 2008: 136). This selfish resentment frequently resurfaces as his brother's condition gets worse: 'Stirling screamed in pain the whole night through, and neither of us got any sleep…"It's a mercy that he will soon be unable to speak," I grumbled the next morning, thinking of the next stage of his illness' (*ibid*.: 202). Leo's conflicted response to Stirling's torment, then, is a less than exemplary one which is, perhaps, more keenly felt by the reader who has by now become familiar with the wise, gentle, and sweet-natured young Stirling, a character at the centre of the plot.

Like many heroes in contemporary young-adult fantasy, then, Leo initially displays recognisably real human failings. Paolini's Eragon, for example, starts out as a disobedient teenager whose defiance of his uncle's wishes compromises

his family's safety; in the opening chapters of *Northern Lights*, Lyra is a wild, undisciplined and often less than likeable young girl. However, in contrast to Leo, their heroic potential and fundamental goodness is never seriously in doubt. We are told, for instance, that Lyra 'was a coarse and greedy little savage, for the most part. But she always had a dim sense that it wasn't her whole world...that somewhere in her life there was a connection with the high world of politics represented by Lord Asriel' (Pullman, 1996: 37). Indeed, in common with many contemporary action fantasy heroes her initial (mis)behaviour frequently signs underlying nobility, courage and/or strength of character. Her selfish defiance of authority in the opening pages of the book is an obvious example. Despite her daemaon's increasing anxiety and distress, she boldly ventures into the forbidden 'Retiring Room', a transgressive disdain for authority that, in the end, leads to her saving Lord Asriel's life. Similar qualities are implied in her wayward but fearless instigation of and participation in violent gang fights, an ability to 'lord it over the other urchins'(*ibid*.: 37), which points to the 'natural' leadership skills suggested by her intuitive connection with Lord Asriel's 'high' world: 'the hero is...dominant over lower orders of his own people. He is the symbol of an elite' (1997: 62). As expected, Lyra is soon employing this inborn authority to achieve more positive heroic aims: she organises a search for children who have been kidnapped by the mysterious 'Gobblers': 'The trouble was that...no one knew what the Gobblers looked like, anyone might be a Gobbler, as Lyra pointed out to the appalled gang, who were now all under her sway, collegers and gyptians alike' (Pullman, 1996: 58).

Even at its worst, then, Lyra's unruly and savage behaviour contains within it reassuring indicators of the moral, heroic self to come. This understanding is confirmed by the 'master' on the eve of her departure from Jordan College: 'You haven't found it easy to obey us, but we are very fond of you, and you've never been a bad child. There's a lot of goodness and sweetness in your nature, and a lot of determination. You're going to need all of that' (Pullman, 1996: 70). Her response, when 'tested', then, is, in the context of young adult fantasy, a not untypically or unexpectedly bold and heroic one which marks the beginning of her

‘journey’ and movement towards emotional and moral growth. Following a brief outburst of despair over Roger’s disappearance, she makes an unequivocal and unselfish commitment to action: ‘This was her world, she wanted it to stay the same for ever and ever, but it was changing around her, for someone out there was stealing children...“We better rescue him, Pantalaimon,” she said…It’ll be dangerous,” he said. “Course! I know that” (*ibid*.: 63).

In contrast to Lyra’s amoral innocence, Leo’s self-consciously unreasonable behaviour and conflicting emotions indicate an uncertain personality and wavering intent. When, after much self-doubt and delay, he embarks on a search for the rare and elusive Bloodflower, whose properties will cure his brother’s ailment, it is, unlike Lyra, with an ongoing sense of hopelessness and gloom: ‘I was pressing my hands to my face and rocking and wailing like a baby. I wasn’t going to find Bloodflower; it had been stupid to think I would. Stirling was going to lie unconscious, and then worsen and then die’. All seems well and heroic stability restored when he finds the ‘blood red star shaped flowers’ in the wet grass at his feet and: ‘like the immortalised *hero’* (Banner, 2008: 220, my italics), races home to enable the much anticipated ‘eleventh-hour’ rescue. In a disturbingly ironic and unexpected climax to this scene, however, Leo finds, on his arrival, that he is just seconds too late: ‘Stirling’s hands were still warm. As if he might open his eyes and grin at me, with his uneven teeth and his freckles and his crew cut that was lighter than his skin… “He passed away just a minute ago”, said Father Dunstan. “He asked for you earlier, when he woke for a short while”’ (*ibid*.: 222).

Leo’s negative self-absorption and tardiness, then, lead to heartbreaking failure in his first transforming test. Whilst there are obvious parallels between this and Lyra’s experience at the end of *Northern Lights*, when she naïvely leads Roger to his death, in her case, the failure is mitigated by an earlier rescue of the children in Bolvanger and her continuing positive resolve. Fuelled by anger and despair, she bravely pursues her father into the mysterious world in the sky, made possible by her young friend’s fatal intercision, and ultimately achieves redemptive resolution

by releasing Roger and his fellow 'ghosts' from the torments of 'hell'. Roger's harrowing (albeit reassuringly distant) 'otherworld' death or 'partial' death, then, proves to be a disturbing but significant plot event; it motivates the maturing Lyra's second adventure in Book Two, in a way that Stirling's arbitrary, meaningless and realistically imagined demise is not. In the aftermath of his brother's death, Leo becomes overwhelmed by guilt and grief as he struggles to come to terms with what is emphasized as an irreversible and irretrievable loss: 'But all flesh rots away…And even if I was in the cold dark earth beside him, he was not here. I could never reach him. But still, I felt as if he was. And I didn't want to leave him here in the dark by himself' (*ibid*.: 230). Experiencing none of Lyra's positive stoicism, he allows himself to be recruited to an unknown fate in the hated King Lucien's army and in a scene filled with pathos, leaves his desperate and vulnerable grandmother behind: 'I hesitated, then followed them. Grandmother was wailing behind us…At the corner I turned for a moment, and she took a few steps towards me, reaching out like a child. "Hurry, will you?" shouted the sergeant. I followed him.' (*ibid*.: 241).

The unsettling indifference that marks the start of Leo's adventure here, also marks a significant contrast with that of Lyra's co-hero Will, who in similar circumstances - he inadvertently kills an intruder - is compelled to leave his home and an emotionally fragile mother behind. Unlike Leo, he dutifully arranges for her care with the kindly Mrs Cooper, before tenderly and sadly taking his leave: 'they hugged tightly, and then Will kissed her again and gently unfastened her arms from his neck before going to the front door. Mrs Cooper could see he was upset…The old lady thought she'd never seen a child so implacable' (Pullman, 1998: 4). Like Lyra and other young fantasy-heroes, Will's drive for justice/truth overcomes a reluctance to leave home and, metaphorically, 'youth' behind. Initial resistance is displaced by determination and a positive, heroic intent. Paolini's hero Eragon, for example, shrinks from the idea of leaving home in the Palancar Valley after the death of his uncle, but before long discovers an 'energy and strength' which compels him to move on: 'His head pounded as he said with

conviction, *I will do it*' (2005: 93). Leo's purposeless and selfish response, then, although plausible, in the context of fantasy, is an incongruously 'realistic' and contrary one: 'At first I just wanted to get away. Get away from Grandmother's crying, and Stirling's empty bed, and sanctimonious Father Dunstan' (Banner, 2008: 243).

The uncertainty this generates about Leo's character and role does not, as with Pullman's and Paolini's quest protagonists, diminish or lessen as the journey progresses. On the contrary, reassuring signs of direction and growth, when they do emerge, continue to be disturbingly piecemeal and impermanent. As he marches with the army, we are told Leo experiences 'a strange sort of calm' (*ibid.*: 243), during which he 'temporarily' surfaces from his self-absorbed anguish and begins to take an interest in the King Lucien's political machinations. When he overhears rumours of revolution and discovers the dictatorship's recruitment of young cadets they don't 'need' is a ploy to 'keep them out of the cities for fear they will revolt' (*ibid.*: 244), he begins to think of his great uncle Alderban's prophecy predicting the triumphant return of the exiled young king. Given Leo's inherited, but as yet undeveloped, magical powers, his heroic quest, it is implied, will reside in the success of these revolts. Although purposeful progression continues to be destabilised by troubling and unexpected setbacks, this does, in fact, turn out to be the case. On the eve of revolution, Leo kills the tyrant king's powerful and hated adviser, Ahira, whom the reader is aware had ten years earlier ruthlessly murdered the rightful king and queen, in the presence of their five year old son. This conventionally clears the way for a new order augured in the prophesied Prince's return. Despite its seeming conformity, however, this too refuses readings as a straightforwardly positive or redemptive heroic act.

In contrast to Pullman's protagonist Will, for instance, who kills three times, Leo's action is not easily justified to himself or others. When he shoots Ahira, he is not enacting a chivalrous revenge: he makes no reference to the murdered king and queen, and is at this point, unaware of Ahira's part in his girlfriend Maria's 'downfall'. Nor is he defending himself or others; his action, in fact, carelessly

endangers his cousin Anna's life. On the contrary, when Leo fires, it is at an unsettlingly easy target, on a somewhat vague but compelling and uncontrollable impulse:

> I hated him above all others. I was so angry that the stars shivered…That was why I did it. That was when I decided. And even in that moment, I was praying silently, Don't let me do this…I put the rifle to my shoulder. I aimed at the man's head. He could not see me, because he had no eye on the right-hand side of his face (*ibid*.: 354).

Given Leo's past conduct this, at the very least, might be seen as an emotional and uncertain act; he has, after all, with little or no provocation, already attacked the seemingly well-intentioned Father Dunstan (whom he despises) and attempted to murder his unexpectedly fair-minded recruiting sergeant (an agent of the enemy), in the wake of an aborted suicide attempt using a stolen army gun: 'There was irritation in his face, but also a hint of what was almost amusement. As if I was a child dragging a game out far too long…"Put that down," he breathed, quiet as ice. I pulled the trigger' (*ibid*.: 249-250).

As in the romantic narrative, the villain Ahira's emergence in a more 'humane' and sympathetic light further complicates understandings for the reader. Whilst attempting to shield and protect the captured Anna from harm in Lucien's custody, he has confessed to her a remorse for his past. This seems partly driven by his fear of retribution, 'It may be just superstition, but I am afraid. There is something strange in the air' (*ibid*.: 334), as well as genuine regret: 'You probably think I am an evil man. But I too have cared about people. I too have loved...I cannot let them kill you. I can't have your blood on my hands as well as his mother's and father's' (*ibid*.: 335). Attempting to atone for his 'sins', Ahira kills the ruthless Lucien, after the young king orders Anna's death, and is in fact, racing her to freedom and safety, an escape Leo compromises when he shoots. In these circumstances, then, Leo's action seems more realistically realised murder rather than romanticised heroic act. Indeed, far from providing unqualified redemption or positive resolution, this fulfilment of his 'destiny' heralds a

questionable new order, at the same time as pushing him to the edge of sanity and despair. He is only saved from a second attempt at self-destruction by Anna who in a ghostly encounter encourages him out of his mordant solipsism and urges him not to end his own life.

The identifiably real and grotesque consequences of Leo's heroic actions, then, persistently undermine or deflate the ideals and expectations of the framing adventure quest in a way that Pullman's radical, yet fundamentally heroic, young protagonists cannot. As Allen observes in his summation of Dale, M. Bauer's (1988) feminist approach, for 'those characters who are alienated and confused by society, who find themselves in the position of the carnivalesque 'Fool', it becomes crucial to interpret the discourses and discursive structures which others in positions of power take as monologically unquestionable' (2005: 161). It cannot be denied that Lyra's action hero status, Will's reluctance to fight, their shared quest, precocious sexuality and heartbreaking transition to adulthood, transgress young-adult fantasy norms; nevertheless, the author's meticulously constructed story and assured adult perspective ensure the traditionally inscribed values and understandings of genre are reinforced: honour, loyalty, virtue and so on. As John Stephens and others point out, in young adult fiction the quest for identity that is stable and whole, in fantasy tends to be one in which humanistic values endure: 'the discourse of fantasy characteristically embodying liberal humanist concepts' (1992: 243). Indeed, in an overtly didactic closing speech Lyra declares to her now 'settled' adult daemon, Pantalaimon:

> 'We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient, and we've got to study and think and work hard, all of us, in all our different worlds' (Pullman, 2001: 548).

The unresolved loose ends and tensions at end of the Banner's story carry no equivalent reassurance or moral 'instruction' for the reader. Looking back on his experiences at the end of novel one, Leo recalls:

> Even if the revolution came too late for me, it altered things. Maria's father returned from the border. His leg was damaged for ever [sic] and he was no longer smiling, but he is alive now...Anselm goes to Sacred Heart Infant School...and even if they have bullet marks in the outside walls and too few books, he will learn to read and write, not fire a gun...The yard has

> not changed; nothing about this building has. They say when the king returned he planned to put running water in all the houses. He has not done that yet (Banner, 1998: 416).

On the contrary, as in the texts' romance narratives, Banner's radically carnivalized heroic discourse expresses a disconcerting and confusing double-perspective from beginning to end. Leo's contradictory and conflicting reminiscences suggest to the reader neither an unequivocally positive or humanist transition nor, as in much criticised contemporary dystopias, an unequivocally nihilistic stance: 'And maybe...you'll think it's a sad story. But it's not – it's really not. It's my life. Everyone's life is sad. Everyone cries. Everyone thinks they're falling sometimes. But in the end we learn to survive' (*ibid.*: 427). In an improved environment, but no positive new dawn, Leo has, undeniably, made progression of sorts: he chooses life over death, and moves into to a more settled, controlled and less selfish adulthood. Nonetheless, there is no sense of his having achieved any unambiguous completeness or arrived at an affirmative autonomy of self. Whilst a loving and caring partner to Maria and a responsible father to their children, it is made clear in Banner's sequel novel that this adult character continues to be troubled by the unresolved traumas and grief of childhood and youth: the loss of his parents, death of his brother, Ahira and so on.

Indeed, in a complete break with young adult convention, where 'Being-towards-death leads adolescent characters into a loss of innocence' (Trites, 2000: 121), it becomes clear that the adult Leo has not transformed his youthful acknowledgement of mortality into any reassuring 'level of triumph', as he continues to experience debilitating bouts of depression. Whilst darker emotions and mental illness are increasingly explored in contemporary children's and young adults' texts, as Reynolds notes, such narratives generally show sensitivity to their young readers' sensibilities by declining to leave 'characters strapped to a see-saw of despair and self-harming' (Reynolds, 2007: 111). Lyra and Will's experience of death for instance is challenging and heart-breaking, but they ultimately emerge triumphant and, of course, older and wiser, from their harrowing journey into hell. Referencing Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories, Reynolds suggests that because

> Despair and depression constitute mental wounds...The wounded child may symbolise a damaged self, but it may equally stand for a damaged culture; this means that if the image of the self as child can be kept intact and unviolated, the myth of innocent childhood that Rose maintains is central to the well-being of adults and the work of children's literature remains in place individually and socially (*ibid*.: 90).

Banner's 'damaged' young protagonist, then, opposes convention because he reaches adulthood without having convincingly accommodated, or come to terms with his grief and guilt. Indeed, before the end of Book Two, he again attempts suicide 'the form of self-harm that is least frequently written about for young people' (Reynolds, 2007: 103), prior to escaping into exile to 'protect' his family from persecution. Leo's character, then, unlike the traditional young adult quest protagonist, never achieves any fully realised adulthood, is never completely 'cohered' or understood. The teenage narrator Anselm, observes of the heavy smoking and sometimes heavy-drinking step-father he cares for and loves: 'there was always a kind of darkness about Leo, a cold side to his spirit that none of us could reach' (Banner, 2009: 24). In Bakhtinian terms, Banner's incongruously 'realist' fantasy hero not only foregrounds the constructed nature of identity, but in contrast to Pullman's essentially chivalrous young heroes, expresses the dialogic or unknowable, 'unfinalized' nature of self. As Morris puts it, carnival's inconsistent fool 'mocks the solemnity of heroes in other genres and opposes the finalised image of human beings they construct' (1994: 121).

Lyra's testing conduct, her deliberate dishonesty and initially poor understanding of her mother, for instance, undeniably distance and empower the reader by encouraging a questioning of her behaviour and judgement as well as their own. Nonetheless, I have shown that her positively inflected qualities, progressive moral development and positive transition, mean that like Will, Eragon, Sephy, Callum and other young heroes of fantasy, she remains a reassuringly familiar hero in whose identity and values we can ultimately trust. As Carole Scott observes, whilst it is difficult to ascertain 'good and evil powers, people and actions' in *His Dark Materials*, the heroes Lyra and Will remain 'clear touchstones of value' (2005: 98). At the same time, 'those who love them and

whom they truly trust - Iorek Byrnison, John Faa, Lee Scoresby, Serafina Pekkala, Balthamos and Baruch, Will's father, and Mary Malone - emerge as figures of worth, strongly defined by their capacity for love' (*ibid.*). And although we remain sceptical of inconsistent and complex characters like Mrs Coulter and Asriel, we are, nevertheless, led to believe their ultimate 'cause is just' (*ibid.*).

The dialogic quality of Pullman's heroic discourse, then, unlike Banner's, is one that ultimately carries a level of certainty deriving from the author's assured storytelling and authoritative narrative address; the trilogy's omniscient third person narrator not only structures the narrative for the reader, but offers 'objective' and trustworthy commentary and explanation throughout:

> It wasn't Lyra's way to brood; she was a sanguine and practical child and besides wasn't imaginative. No one with much imagination would have seriously thought it possible to come all this way and rescue her friend Roger...Being a practical liar doesn't mean you have a powerful imagination. Many good liars have no imagination at all; it's that which gives their lies such a wide-eyed conviction (Pullman, 1997: 249).

Banner's unconventionally disordered first-person narrative, by contrast, emerges in fragments through story and diary extracts, dreams, visions, letters, personal recollections and so on, and is one in which no single, authoritative, organising or consistent voice prevails. The hero Leo is an uncertain character and like Anselm in Book Two, a self-consciously unreliable narrator: 'you cannot trust the words people use sometimes' (Banner, 2008: 18), whose observations, we have seen, frequently contest what is actually represented and 'heard'. Thus, in the ever-shifting ground of Banner's heroic narrative nothing is ever certain or sure: the brutal and cruel schoolmaster and bully Sergeant Markey, for instance, is an unexpectedly loving and caring father who shows an unanticipated and unexplained compassion for Stirling in the moments after his collapse; the suspicious and unscrupulous, 'oily haired' (Banner, 2009: 199) gun-runner Jared, proves a genuinely caring and concerned mentor to the unsettled young hero of Book Two; capable of selfishly deceiving him, he also, ends up saving the young man's life. Conversely, the archetypal 'figure of worth' the wise old magician Alderban/Arthur Field is on a number of occasions, bewilderingly insinuated as a

deceitful, menacing and threatening man: his trusting and vulnerable elderly employer 'was under the strange man's power; the sinister grey eyes and the skull like smile and the mind behind the mask of casual indifference had drawn him in, and he was going to employ Arthur Field against his better judgement' (Banner, 2009: 44). This unease is emphasized when the reluctant pre-destined hero he presses into kingship, turns out to be an ineffectual leader presiding over a far from blameless regime.

As in the texts' romance narratives, then, generic conflict and carnivalesque contradiction within and between characters and situations remains unexplained and disconcertingly unresolved: 'nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world, is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future' (Bakhtin, 2009: 166). In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984/2009), Bakhtin links this sense of unfinalizability to the polyphonic text: 'There is nothing in the novel which can relax within itself, enter the ordinary flow of biographical time and develop in it...Everything requires change and rebirth. Everything is shown in a moment of unfinalized transition' (*ibid*.: 167). So, in contrast to Pullman's heroic-romance, the reader of Banner's fantasy is forced to contend with a challenging, and unresolved interaction of diverse discourse types, sometimes within the same speaking subject, without the author ever intervening between character and reader to explain, guide or 'instruct'. Simon Dentith's distinctions between the various types of dialogism sum up these differences in approach:

> ...[some] varieties of double-voiced discourse...most parody and much irony, allows the reader to assume a position of secure knowledge beyond the word of the character...Thus parody and some forms of irony can in fact be the local forms of discourse in which monologism is secured. By contrast, other forms of double-voice discourse provoke a much more radical insecurity in the reader...the character's word is dialogized and enjoys no ultimate authority...In this situation, no position of secure knowledge can be inferred...(1995: 48).

2.5. Knowing the Self: Who am 'I'?

Banner's uninhibited disregard for the conventions of age category and genre, then, not only challenge notions of 'appropriateness' in young adult literature, but by permitting a disorientating ambivalence and irresolution, disrupt fantasy's narratives of youthful development and growth. The denial of any definitive or easily defined progression, of course, can be seen as a consequence of Banner's own youth: not having become an 'adult' herself, it can be argued that the teenage author is unlikely to have the knowledge, insight or indeed distance needed to represent any such development or transition. As I have demonstrated, however, it is this lack of distance, that allows her to so effectively challenge the conventional understandings residing in responsibly 're-imagined', nostalgic and distanced adult accounts. As Waller observes, 'Where identity is considered a suitable site for deconstruction in adult literary endeavours, teenage fiction is restricted by its continuing relation to education, edification and appropriateness' (2009: 196).

So, whilst radical contemporary authors might imply that adulthood is neither universal nor unified, they have yet to generate 'narratives that explore the realm of adolescence without recourse to the teleology of development and adulthood' (*ibid*). Because she is unconstrained by this recourse, the teenage Banner, on the other hand, gives us uncensored and unsentimental representations which acknowledge the frailty of barriers between adulthood and childhood. Her narrative suggests that transition to adulthood is more a consequence of time and circumstance, rather than any self-defining linear development or symbolically significant romantic/sexual progression. If life is to be viewed as a process of shaping and becoming, the grotesque realism in her novels, confronts us with the understanding that it is an *unfinished* and shifting, rather than *finalizable* process and that straightforward progression to autonomous adult identity is a socially constructed ideal which can be regarded with scepticism. In place of 'adult' nostalgia for lost youth (innocence, in her narrative is quite literally killed off; Leo welcomes his escape from home) and responsible moralistic development, we

have only prosaic, ongoing uncertainty. As a consequence, Banner's quest narratives embody Freud's understanding, which Rose insists is avoided in children's literature, that is, that unsettled and contradictory youth is never simply left behind, 'no childhood...is simply over and done with' (1992: 17). Leo tells his listener: 'To me what was past was still here. It was not dead and gone' (Banner, 2008: 413). Identity in Banner's fantasy texts, then, remains unconventionally elusive, or 'unfinalizable'; it declines to be fixed or 'settled', either in terms of gender or age. So, whilst Banner does not provide the complex content and intellectual challenges experienced mature writers like Pullman do, her uninhibited and uncompromisingly direct address of familiar young adult themes: love, romance, death, grief, single-parenthood and so on, produce altogether more radical and polyphonic understandings of identity and self. I would argue that, in this context, her works can be more accurately categorised as 'hybrid' crossovers, rather than 'children's' stories with dual audience appeal.

In this chapter I have argued that intrusions of the grotesque and the identifiably real in Banner's work effect a challenge to conventional young adult narratives that the more traditionally structured fantasy quests do not. In a continuation of this theme, Chapter Three will establish how realistic depictions of death and violence offer similar opportunities for resistance in the characteristically contentious young adult dystopian mode.

Chapter 3: The Influence of Media: Representations of Gender, Violent Action and Death in Young Adult Dystopias

3.1. Dystopian Themes

The uncertainty in Catherine Banner's romantic and heroic narratives, then, suggests something far more challenging than what we can expect to find in even the most radical other-world fantasy text. In this respect her generically hybrid mode might be more appropriately aligned with the current crop of young-adult dystopian texts now dominating the children's and adults' best seller charts. Like Banner's imagined 'Malonia', dystopias enact a social or political critique set in a familiar world 'slightly removed from today's reality' (Lloyd in Craig, 2012). In this strand of fiction: 'the only genre written for children that's routinely less didactic than its adult counterpart' (Miller, 2010), there is undeniably a more direct and less overtly censored address of romance, heroics and death. Meg Rosoff's award winning dystopian novel *How I Live Now* (2004/2007), for instance, has at its centre an angry, cynical, anorexic teenager called Daisy. The story she narrates 'is full of shocking events – underage sex, a whiff of incest, appalling violence' (Bedell, 2004). Reviewing the film version of the hugely popular young adult dystopia *Hunger Games* (2012), Anthony Oliver Scott and Manohla Dargis (2012) hail author Suzanne Collins' complex and contradictory young female hero Katniss, as 'one of the most radical female characters to appear in American movies'; in the film, as in the novel, Collins' resourceful and determined female hero is pitted against fellow game-show contestants in a terrifying and violent fight to the death. As children's author Moira Young points out: 'It used once to be taboo for children to kill children in stories: now it's *de rigueur*' (in Craig, 2012). And Collins is by no means the most controversial in this respect. Sarah Pitre warns: 'If you think Suzanne Collins is mean in *Hunger Games* with all the people she kills, just wait'til you meet Patrick Ness. He will make you cry' (in Neary, 2012).

In ‘Bedtime Stories to Disturb your Sleep’, Inbali Iserles (2011: 65) notes that these grim young adult texts are currently outstripping sales of more traditional fantasy novels. Although the appeal of dystopian novels to young readers is an established one, as Iserles confirms, the production of this kind of text specifically for teenagers is a new publishing phenomenon. Seeking to explain this development, Kay Springen (2010), Lorna Bradbury (2012), Amanda Craig (2012) and others position this new wave as part of the zeitgeist. In ‘Children’s Books: Apocalypse Now’, Springen suggests that in the age of ‘terrorism, global warming...wars...and lingering unease from the World Trade centre attacks’ (Springen, 2010), young people are feeling ‘uneasy’ and anxious about what the future will hold. As child psychiatrist Elizabeth Berger points out: ‘The dystopic novel reflects the current mood of the new generation who see that their future isn’t as rosy’ (in Springen, 2010)[4]. Seasoned publisher Jewell Stoddard, on the other hand, considers the influence of ‘younger’ publishers, editors and writers who ‘are used to videogames and TV and really violent movies’, as a significant factor in driving this trend: publishers ‘think that every 12 year old is going to love that stuff and not be affected by it. And I don’t think that’s possible’ (in Cox-Gurdon, 2011). Whilst Stoddard clearly feels some apprehension about the way such works reflect the more violent aspects of video games, movies and so on, Berger (2010), Ness (2010) and others argue that the terrifying and violent worlds created within dystopic texts provide young readers with an opportunity to live out their fears and have the potential to make them feel better about their own lives: teenagers with ‘body chemistry in violent disarray, emotions running high’ respond best to art that is ‘repetitively cathartic’ (Ness in Thackray Jones 2010). However, it is not made clear whether Ness has empirical evidence to support this claim.

The complex narratives, fast-paced plots and dark themes explored in these texts, of course, have an appeal which reaches beyond the targeted young adult audience. *Hunger Games,* for example, dominates Amazon’s *general* best seller lists, whilst Ness’s *Chaos Walking* (2008-2010) trilogy, is applauded for its

[4] As it is mostly adult authors writing these narratives, there is also the possibility that ‘adults’ are projecting their own anxieties and guilt on to ‘the young’.

crossover appeal: it will 'almost certainly come to be seen as one of the outstanding literary achievements of the present century, whether viewed as fiction for the young or for a wider readership' (Dunbar, 2010). Not all reviewers are as fulsome in their praise as Robert Dunbar. As Nicolette Jones observes, whilst attracting acclaim and awards, Ness's 'uncompromising' novels for young readers also draw criticism and 'censure' (2011: 22) for their violence and dark themes. Children's book critic Meghan Cox-Gurdon (2011) and others argue that such content is entirely inappropriate for adolescent readers and should be confined to an adult readership. Do these 'edgier' and seemingly 'less didactic' young-adult dystopias, then, represent a blurring of conventional age categories, appropriate or otherwise, less easily achieved in the more classic fantasy mode?

To explore this question more fully, I shall consider whether the reflection of new media identified in contemporary young adult dystopias indicates a drive for relevancy which Cox-Gurdon argues simply 'bulldozes coarseness or misery into...children's lives' (*ibid.*), or whether they have a compelling immediacy which, on the contrary, offers new understandings and subversive narratives which empower and celebrate childhood and adolescence. Through a comparative analysis of Patrick Ness's controversial award-winning fantasy *Chaos Walking*, a series leading the new wave, and teenage author Isamu Fukui's fantastically violent, action-packed *Truancy* trilogy (2008-2012), I shall explore the understandings and perspectives each author offers through media influenced representations of gender, violent action and death. These are almost certainly the most contentious and distinguishing aspects of the current young adult dystopian genre.

3.2. Sisters are Doing it for Themselves

As intimated in the above assessment of romantic relations in Malorie Blackman's dystopic novel *Noughts and Crosses* (2001), itself a radical and ground-breaking precursor to the current trend, there is a direct address of sex, but perhaps more specifically death and violence, which shows little of the sensitivity to youthful

sensibilities identified in Pullman's parallel-fantasy texts. In contrast to traditional hierarchies identified in Blackman's novel, however, the current crop of dystopias are introducing female protagonists more closely aligned to twenty-first century popular culture: film, video-games and so on, than the heroine of conventional literary romance. On the contrary, the physically powerful, decisive and assured female protagonists of the new young adult dystopias are equally, if not more, able than their male counterparts to look after or defend themselves and the ones they love. As Craig observes: 'Katniss in the *Hunger Games* has hunting skills and a fierce protectiveness towards her little sister that make her, like Meg Rosoff's Daisy, and Moira Young's Saba, the opposite to Stephanie Meyer's passive virtuous vampire-lover Bella Swan' (Craig, 2012). Craig argues that this development is particularly appealing to young women in an era when alternative media images and 'internet pornography' are seen by many to warp understandings of, and attitudes towards women and girls. Like Lynn Neary (2012) she considers this a defining feature of contemporary dystopias and one which has extended the appeal of a genre traditionally 'popular with boys' (Craig, 2012) to a new audience of teenage girls.

In his *Chaos Walking* trilogy, gender identity and the impact of misleading and distorted internet/tabloid-style representations are explored imaginatively by Ness. Set in the future on a planet similar to our own, the colonised 'New World' he creates is one in which men and animals can hear one another's thoughts in 'Noise': a metaphor for the confusing babble of twenty-first century life: 'the Internet... texting...networking sites, there's...information everywhere' (Ness in Levy, 2009), but in which women's inner reflections remain unheard. The opening chapters of the first novel in the trilogy *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008) introduce the story's two young protagonists. The first, twelve year old hero Todd Hewitt is the youngest inhabitant of a frontier style settlement called 'Prentisstown'. Todd, rapidly approaching his thirteenth birthday (calculated on thirteen month years), has grown up in this all male environment where he has been led to believe that a mysterious germ released by the 'New World's' indigenous inhabitants, 'Spackle', killed all the town's women and was

responsible for unleashing 'Noise' on the surviving men. However, when he discovers a spot of 'moving silence' in the swamp one day, Todd begins to question what he has been told. Unable to keep his discovery secret, the young hero finds himself compelled to flee Prentisstown by his loving surrogate parents Ben and Cillian. Armed with a hunting knife and a backpack of supplies, a confused and resistant Todd makes his reluctant escape and soon discovers the source of the 'hole in the Noise' he has detected: the story's key female protagonist Viola Eade. Viola has survived the crash landing of a scout vessel sent ahead of a spaceship convoy transporting a new wave of colonists from the 'Old World'. The crash has killed her parents and left her isolated and unable to contact the mother-ship.

When the two traumatised and disorientated young teenagers first meet, then, it inevitably proves a frightening and bewildering encounter for them both. For Todd, the narrator of Book One, Viola is an alluring mystery 'the stillness ...pulls at me' (Ness, 2008: 15) at the same time as being a shock and a threat: 'I stop right there in my tracks./I don't, I do absolutely not put down the knife' (*ibid*.: 63). He struggles to identify her by drawing on what he 'knows' about women and girls. 'I know what a girl is. Course I do. I seen 'em in the Noise of their fathers in town...I seen 'em in vids, too. Girls are small and polite and smiley. They wear dresses and their hair is long...They do all the inside house chores, while boys do all the outside' (*ibid*.: 68). These understandings, however, are immediately challenged by what he actually observes: 'Her hair ain't long. And she ain't wearing no dress, she's wearing clothes that look like way newer versions of mine...and she ain't that small, she's my size...and she's sure as all that's unholy not smiley' (*ibid*.: 69). Despite his confusion, however, intuition confirms to Todd that 'it' is a girl: 'It looks at me...Don't ask me. Something about her shape, something about her smell, something I don't know but it's there and she's a girl...And she ain't another boy...She ain't nothing like me at all. *She's something completely else altogether'* (*ibid*.: 70). So amidst a rush of conflicting images and ideas Todd ultimately confirms Viola's gender by her difference to himself and the other males he knows. This sense of her 'otherness' is reinforced

for Todd, and indeed the reader, by her infuriating Noislessness and initial refusal to speak. 'I get a little madder and I say it yet again, "Who are you?" and I hold out the knife a little farther...and she's just looking back at me. With no Noise at all' (*ibid*.).

Their joint adventure begins soon after when this warily uncommunicative heroine, as anticipated, is rescued by Todd after she is seized by the crazed Prentisstown preacher, Aaron, who has followed them into the swamp. The young hero finds himself fighting for his life against Aaron, but discovers he is morally unable to bring himself to 'finish off' the murderous foe: 'A knife isn't just a thing, is it? It's something you do' (*ibid*.: 84). Leaving behind the badly injured preacher, the two young people begin to run for their lives only to discover they are being hunted by a force of Prentisstown men, led by the town's Mayor Prentiss himself. As the story unfolds, however, Viola through her actions, and ultimately her speech, gradually emerges as the more authoritative, knowing, and self-possessed of the two. For instance, when Todd unsuccessfully attempts to stall their fast advancing pursuers by sabotaging a rope bridge, he desperately 'hacks' at it with his 'fearsome, serrated knife', and he becomes increasingly panic stricken. Turning on Viola he screams in anger and frustration: 'If you hadn't shown up in that swamp, none of this woulda happened! I'd be home RIGHT NOW!...You're empty and NOTHING and we're gonna die FOR NOTHING!....my Noise raging so loud, so *red*, that I have to raise my fists to her, I have to make her ruddy silence STOP' (*ibid*.: 123). Unflustered and impassive in the face of this outburst, the intractably silent 'girl' merely steps in and takes control:

> 'What're you doing?' I say.
> She takes out the campfire box, looking all around her till I see her see a good sized rock...She brings down the rock and the box cracks. It starts to leak some kind of fluid...and she starts flinging fluid all over the knots on the closest stake...The girl turns to me telling me with her hands to get back...she tosses the box in the air and jumps back towards me...and we watch as the campfire box falls...I think we're gonna catch fire ourselves when this end of the bridge just falls right away (*ibid*.: 126).

As a space traveller Viola is, inevitably, technically competent and repeatedly deploys devices of this kind to provide protection for them both. As a top student on the settlers' spaceship we also discover that her general education is good. Brought up in an isolated, farming community where education has been banned Todd, by contrast, lacks technological awareness and is barely literate, a fact emphasized by his idiosyncratic speech. Although she is new to the planet and unfamiliar with Prentiss Town history, then, Viola, empowered by her superior education and knowledge, is the first to work out the importance of Todd's uninitiated innocence and reluctance to kill his fellow men (both are, as yet, unaware that in Prentisstown, this has been an enforced rite of passage marking transition from boyhood). After rescuing them from a second assailant, Davy, the town Mayor's son, the now speaking Viola once more calms an emotional and volatile Todd and explains to him the significance of his stance: 'I think I'm finally understanding the story Todd...Why...a whole army [is] chasing you across towns and rivers and plains...[They want] to *make* you a killer...If they can snuff out...the part of you that won't kill, then they win, don't you see?' (Ness, 2008: 265).

Although Todd becomes passionately protective as their friendship grows, in the end, his innocence and goodness foster in the more mature and assured Viola a sense of responsibility which repeatedly positions her in the more authoritative and conventionally *male* action-hero role. In a carnivalesque encounter at the end of Book One, for example, the pantomimic figure of religious authority Aaron 'who won't die' (*ibid*.: 117), unhindered by grotesque injuries sustained in previous encounters with this pair, (amongst other things, he has lost an ear and half of his face in a crocodile attack and Todd's dog Manchee has bitten off his nose), attacks the young protagonists for a *fifth* time. Continuing to identify Viola's god-given purpose in this initiation, as a romantically sacrificial and passive one, the preacher taunts the young boy: 'Todd Hewitt would protect the helpless...Here I am Todd...Fulfil yer purpose. Become a man."...He jumps forward like a spider, grabbing Voila's right arm' (*ibid*.: 455). In a protracted and lengthy struggle both Todd *and* Viola put up a fierce physical fight, but whilst

Viola 'CLUMPS him [Aaron] on the side of his head with a rock she can barely lift' (*ibid*.: 457), Todd remains reluctant to kill off their foe until that is he believes Viola to be dead. At this point, Todd's 'Noise screams red' (*ibid*.: 459), he reigns blows on the unresisting Aaron's face and finally reaches for his knife, however:

> ...another hand is there first-
>
> Viola...
> I can see Aaron sitting up and he's only got one eye now and it's staring at Viola as she's raising the knife and she's bringing it forward...Aaron's Noise is radiating anger and fear and it's saying *No–*
> It's saying *Not you-*
> *And Viola's raising her arm-*
> *Raising the knife-*
> *And bringing it down-*
> *And down-*
> *And down-*
> *And plunging it straight into the side of Aaron's neck-*
> *So hard the point comes out of the other side-*
> *And there's a crunch, a crunch I remember- (ibid*.: *462).*

Voila's violent, and in this instance, viscerally physical despatch of the villain, for a third time, saves both of their lives and protectively preserves Todd's special goodness by foiling the enemy's attempt to turn Todd 'into the kind of man they want' (*ibid*.: 265).

These heroic gender reversals continue in Books Two and Three of the trilogy, when the young friends become separated and find themselves on opposing forces in a brutal and bloody war. The beginning of Book Two, *The Ask and The Answer* (2009), sees Viola recovering from near fatal injuries sustained after being shot by Davy Prentiss. When she wakes in the previously free-town of Haven's 'House of Healing', she discovers Todd is being held by Mayor Prentiss who is now the self-appointed 'President' of this occupied community, renamed New Prentisstown. Now a joint narrator whose version of events alternate with Todd's, the physically weakened Viola declares her intention to rescue her vulnerable love: 'But he can't kill...not even to save himself...That's why they wanted him so bad. He isn't like them...And now they've got him...I need to get out of here...I need to find him' (Ness, 2009: 92). And this heroic responsibility persists regardless of danger or

cost to herself. One rescue attempt, for example, sees her voluntarily submit to cattle banding, (an excruciatingly painful and life threatening procedure) to avoid detection in Prentisstown where all the women are 'banded' and where Todd continues to be held. When this is unsuccessful she is caught and subjected to 'waterboard' torture, a graphically depicted horror she stoically endures.

Repeatedly referred to as a natural leader, 'I sense big things in you, my girl...Leadership qualities' (*ibid.*: 98), Viola becomes part of the calculating Mistress Coyle's insurgent resistance movement 'The Answer', whilst Todd is forced to submit to their enemy, the murderous and unscrupulous Mayor. Both young protagonists are deceived and betrayed by their manipulative adult mentors; however, Viola proves far more active and effective in her opposition than the innocent and malleable Todd who comes to depend on Viola for moral motivation as well as physical, emotional and psychological support. As the Mayor's insidious influence increases, Viola frequently warns her susceptible friend against trusting this man, and despite her fears that she's failed to shield him sufficiently, Viola, in the end, does succeed in 'rescuing' Todd. When the mayor forcibly flies him to the Ocean in a stolen spacecraft for the penultimate battle in *Monsters of Men* (2010), Todd attempts to defend himself against this man's 'mind' attacks as he always has, by thinking Viola's name. The mayor's greater power, nevertheless, finds Todd struggling to survive on his own. Just when all seems hopeless, however, Viola like romantic fantasy's 'knight in shining armour' quite literally gallops to the rescue:

> VIOLA
> Cuz she's here-
> She came-
> She came for *me*-
> And she calls *my* name-
> And I feel her strength coursing thru my Noise like a fire-
> And the mayor staggers back like he's been punched in the face by a row of houses-
> 'Ah, yes...your tower of strength has arrived.'
> 'Todd!' I hear her call again-
> And I take it and I use it-
> Cuz I feel her there, riding to the end of the world to find me, to save me if I needed saving-
> Which I did-

And-
VIOLA
The Mayor staggers back again- (Ness, 2010: 561)

Viola's presence gives Todd, a renewed energy. With her immanent strength now coursing through his Noise 'like a fire' he is able to strike a powerful blow. Faced with their combined power, the mayor is forced to accept defeat: 'This world will be shaped by the two of you for years to come, Todd...And I, for one...am glad that I shall never have to see it"/and he spins round and takes one big stride towards the surf, then another, then another-'into the jaws of the 'huge' man-eating sea creature 'and quick as that-/He's gone' (*ibid*.: 566).

In a reversal of conventional hierarchies, the mysterious female 'other' confounds romantic expectations to emerge as a rational, knowing and assertive female action-protagonist who repeatedly rescues (physically and emotionally) the 'innocent' and vulnerable boy hero that she loves. So, although ostensibly less playful than in Banner's texts, carnivalesque reversals here, too, draw attention to roles and role play, and when aligned to Ness's self-conscious references to secondary 'media-style' sources: 'vids' and 'Noise' heighten awareness of gender as a social/political/religious construct: 'Aaron's Noise is blazing so loud...THE HOLY SACRAMENT and THE SIGN FROM GOD...and the pictures of the girl drinking wine and eating the host, pictures of the girl as an angel...The girl as sacrifice' (Ness, 2008: 80). Todd is forced to make sense of Viola and, subsequently, the very different women he meets, out of a literal polyphony of conflicting voices, images and information which he hears and sees: 'Noise women have lighter hair and bigger chests and wear less clothes and are a lot freer with their affecshuns than in the vids...' (*ibid*.: 23). These assimilations are repeatedly challenged, revised and/or replaced by his, and through him, the reader's experience of the grotesquely realised 'real' thing. Thus the mysterious and threatening 'other' is transformed into a complex but identifiably real 'down to earth' young person that Todd no longer needs to fear.

3.3. The Grotesque Innocence of Youth

Whilst Todd's childlike vulnerability frequently positions Viola in the traditionally male action-hero role, his uninitiated youthfulness cannot be read in simple oppositional terms as the conventionally submissive and *feminised* romantic kind: 'children are traditionally assigned more feminine traits of passivity, innocence, and compassion' (Fentin, 2012: 13). On the contrary, Todd's ambivalent thoughts and actions encourage a radical questioning of what childhood innocence actually represents. Ness's emphasis on Todd's refusal to kill his fellow wo/men recalls familiar notions of 'childish innocence untouched by human flaws' (*ibid*.: 14), but this is disturbed by his seemingly contrary participation in horrifically violent and gratuitously cruel acts. In Book One, for instance, Todd ferociously attacks and murders the first 'alien' Spackle he sees. As with women, his 'knowledge' of Spackle, up to this point, has been based on secondary sources alone: 'I've never seen a woman or a Spackle in the flesh, obviously. I've seen 'em both in vids, of course, before they were outlawed, and I see them all the time in the Noise of men cuz what else do men think about except sex and enemies?' (Ness, 2008: 22). When he first encounters this 'enemy', he experiences an unsurprising disbelief as he has been led to believe that all Spackle had 'died in the wars' (*ibid*.: 271). Motivated by fear and an anger mixed with distaste for the Spackle's physical difference, Todd launches an unexpectedly shocking and vicious attack which ends in death: 'I punch the knife into his chest./ It crunches as it goes in…he looks up at me with his black, black eyes and his Noise filled with pain and bafflement and fear.. And in a moan and a shudder he dies' (*ibid*.: 275). The cruel futility of this assault is emphasized when Todd's attempts to vindicate himself are angrily dismissed by an appalled Viola who furiously forces him to face the reality of what he has done. As in Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival, degradation and abuse, then, function to remove fear and here ironically generate sympathy for the young hero's unwitting victim, as the reader is able to identify with the Spackle's *human* emotions of fear and terror as well as

his physical torment. As in Viola's case, grotesque realism transforms the mysterious 'alien' other into something identifiably real: degradations 'bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh' (Bakhtin, 1984: 20).

This ferocious assault creates a sense of ambivalence about Todd's behaviour which persists throughout. When Todd is separated from Viola at the start of Book Two, for example, the Mayor at first controls the young hero by threatening Viola's safety. Todd is thus *coerced* into overseeing an enclosure of enslaved Spackles alongside the hateful Davy Prentiss who has shot and seriously injured Viola. The horror and remorse Todd first experiences after being pressured to physically number individual Spackles using metal 'cattle' bands and a 'bolting tool', however, is replaced by an uncomfortable and, in the context of young heroic narratives, controversially hostile 'racist' stance. His motivation here, recalls the prejudice implied in his initial Spackle attack: '1150 pairs of Spackle eyes watching us, watching *me*, like their effing farm animals looking up from their grazing cuz they heard a loud noise./Stupid effing *sheep*./"GET TO WORK!" I shout' (Ness, 2009: 246). When he *is* challenged by a defiant Spackle (1017) soon after, however, he resorts to violence, beating the unarmed and defenceless 'alien' in yet another disturbingly brutal assault: 'I knock him hard in the face with the butt of the rifle...I hit him again and again and again...1017 is looking up at me, red blood pouring from his weird nose and the corner of his too-high eyes...' (Ness, 2009: 267).

Subjected to the Mayor's continuing propaganda and mind-control techniques, then, Todd, without Viola's steadying influence, begins to lose his way and struggles to develop a sense of self amidst the conflicting images and information he sees and 'hears'. When he witnesses the aftermath of the horrific massacre of enslaved Spackles, for instance, Todd is tormented by inner confusion and guilt:

> I keep walking, not blinking...not believing what I'm seeing, not taking it in the scale of it-
> Cuz I have to step over bodies with arms flung out, arms with bands round 'em that I put there, twisted mouths that I fed, broken backs that I-
> That I-
> Oh, God.

> Oh, god, no, I hated ‘em-
> I tried not to but I couldn’t help it.
> (no, I could).
> I think of all the times I cursed ‘em...imagined them as sheep-...
> But I didn’t want *this*...And I come to the biggest pile of bodies stacked near the east wall- (Ness, 2009: 306).

Confronted with the grotesque reality of death on a mass scale, Todd is reminded of his commonality with the creatures he has repeatedly dehumanised and distanced himself from. This carnivalesque recognition, however, ironically motivates and justifies further atrocities and abusive acts. Encouraged to believe the massacre has been carried out by the female led resistance movement of which Viola is a part, Todd allows himself to be persuaded by the Mayor to band the town’s now segregated women ‘so we can fight against enemy infiltration on the inside’ (*ibid*.: 344). Todd carries out his duties efficiently and to the unnerved Davy’s surprise, with no outward signs of emotion. ‘Todd? Davy says...How do you *do* it? Be so calm ‘bout it all. Be so, I don’t know, *unfeeling*’ (*ibid*.: 362). When later accused of torturing the women by Haven’s defenestrated Mayor Ledger, Todd blinks in surprise and growls, ‘I don’t torture ‘em...We do it fast and without fuss. There are a lot of ways to make it worse’ (*ibid*.: 363).

On the one hand, then, Todd’s youthful naïvety, emphasized by his self-consciously unschooled vernacular, represents a conventional innocence which has the power to transform others, (as indicated above the mayor is partially reformed as is his teenage son). The initially hostile and vindictive Davy arouses our sympathy as he learns compassion and begins to feel remorse through his growing love and respect for Todd. Indeed such is the transformation, he fatally challenges his father on a distraught Todd’s behalf in order to save Viola from continuing torture and death. On the other hand, Todd’s uneducated inexperience and sensitivity make him particularly vulnerable to the confusing ‘churn and bubble’ (Ness, 2008: 17) of Noise, a literal polyphony of conflicting voices which, if unchallenged, can provoke and validate disturbingly violent and cruel acts. This carnivalized, self-consciously intertextual discourse precludes reader empathy as, initially at least, it is difficult to read and understand. At the same

time, it has a double-voiced quality which by foregrounding Todd's dependence on other people's utterances, highlights the difficulty of stable or uncontested meaning and 'truths'. As Bakhtin observes:

> ...the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context...When a member of the speaking collective comes upon a word, it is not a neutral word of language, not as a word free from the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others' voices... (Bakhtin, 2009: 202).

Carnivalesque disruptions and inversions in Ness's texts, then, articulate a radical acknowledgement of the contradictions of childhood that Rose (1992) insists children's literature seeks to deny. Indeed, Sandra Beckett (2009) and others have pointed out the many examples in children's and young adults' literature and culture which might be said to contest this view. As already indicated, however, the graphically violent nature of current dystopias reflecting new media generates concerns which underline the continuing pertinence and relevance of Rose's account. Rose's argument is linked to the understanding that the self is constructed through language and if this is seen as being unstable or arbitrary it becomes a threat to that self. The image of the innocent child she places 'at the centre of children's literature is derived from its assumed inborn access to language uncontaminated by adult understanding' (Reynolds, 2007: 7) and, as a consequence, represents a point of origin and stability which must be preserved. As Reynolds suggests, this perhaps explains why:

> even when adults fear the young and when children under sixteen are responsible for rising proportions of contemporary crimes including violent robberies and murders, there remains a conviction that children as a group should have special rights, including the right to a childhood (*ibid*.).

Whilst the 'gatekeepers' of children's/young adults' literature may be troubled by the graphically violent content of contemporary dystopian texts, its impact for many young adult readers would seem to be a relatively muted one. At a writing conference attended by Ness and fellow author Saci Lloyd, Bradbury observed how such texts 'struck a chord with' (Bradbury, 2012) the young audiences. She, like Ness, noted how the dark scenarios in young adult dystopias were no worse than what children and teenagers actually produce themselves. This is certainly

confirmed by fifteen year old author Isamu Fukui's dystopian trilogy *Truancy*. The stunningly detailed and grotesque violence in Fukui's dystopia, is as graphic and copious as in Ness's account. However, I shall suggest that the young author's utilisation of modern media, results in an innovative structure and content which in the end, articulates altogether more radical understandings of childhood and youth.

3.4. Violence, Murder and Mayhem: All part of Growing Up

Fukui's *Truancy* trilogy is imagined in an urban setting recalling modern day New York. In this nameless city the children are repressed and abused under a draconian education system presided over by a ruthless and autocratic Mayor and his team of adult Educators and Enforcers. Fighting against this tyranny is a group of young ex-students – teenagers and children - who are part of an urban guerrilla movement called 'Truancy'. In reviews posted online Paul Stotts and Rick Kleffel describe Fukui's story as a 'high-octane...action extravaganza' (Stotts, 2009), which in contrast to Ness's narrative, depicts the battling rival factions with a 'graphically violent glee' (Kleffel, 2008). Whilst, Ness's radically violent action carries within it an unambiguous critique, Fukui's carnivalized action sequences do not. That is, alongside a conventionally expressed censure of violence in the young author's novels, there is a subversive and disruptive celebration of its liberating excitement and appeal. When one key protagonist, fifteen year old Zen, leaves home to put his plans for armed resistance into action, for instance, he experiences 'an airy, liberating feeling within him, an excitement stemming...from his newfound independence...Others would join him later, he knew, but for now it was just him against the City, and he couldn't wait for the first battle to be fought' (Fukui, 2009: 92). Transforming himself into a 'caped crusader', his black windbreaker jacket 'around his neck leaving sleeves loose so it splayed behind him like a cape' (*ibid*.: 83), Zen goes on to achieve his ambition to form a resistance group called 'Truancy' where he renames himself 'Z' then 'Zyid' (hereafter Zen).

As the leader of Truancy, Zen carries out and sanctions killing and torture with few signs of guilt or compunction, aside from sporadically expressed regret: ‘Zyid hurled the bottle at the pillar. It quickly burst, and sprayed what looked like liquid fire everywhere...There was a scream of pain as the guard leapt from behind the pillar...Zyid allowed himself a satisfied grin. The motor oil stuck stubbornly...Ignoring the agonized shrieks from the guard who was fast becoming a human torch’ (Fukui, 2008: 57). Zen’s successor Takan/Tack (hereafter Takan) and his opponent Cross, who is head of the rival Student Militia in Book Three, express occasional remorse for the murder and mayhem they spread, but as with Zen these misgivings are more often displaced by the exhilarating effects of combat and war: ‘Cross fought for the sake of fighting. He didn’t enjoy the killing itself. It was the danger and excitement of fighting that came from being one mistake away from death’ (Fukui, 2009: 27). Physical combat and violence proves equally compelling for the female protagonists in Fukui’s novels. Zen’s half-sister, General Iris, the fierce and commanding leader of Government forces, is respected for her ruthless combat skills, whilst Noni, an abused and half-starved girl, under Zen’s tutelage, is transformed into his esteemed and feared second-in-command. With her ‘sleek black hair’ and ‘braided pony tail’, this efficient Lara Croft-style assassin, like Iris, despatches her enemies without sentiment or unease: ‘Then she spun around and plunged her pencil into the soldier’s eye...Noni wore a look of utmost fury as she drove the pencil deeper into her victim’ (Fukui, 2012: 275).

The *pacifist* protagonists in Fukui’s novels, student mentors the albino/ghost/teacher (hereafter the albino) and ‘Umasi’, Zen’s peace-loving twin, represent an equally ambivalent stance as they wield their great influence by employing incredible and lethal fighting skills. In this respect Umasi, in particular, turns out to be almost as unconvincing and unreliable an ambassador for peace as his battle-hungry compatriots. In common with Ness’s protagonist Todd, for instance, he expresses a reluctance to kill at the same time as showing himself capable of carrying out extremely brutal acts. Refusing to take sides in the war between adult Enforcers and Truancy, he somewhat paradoxically spends his time training fellow ex-students how to fight and kill successfully using martial arts:

'Think Cain in Kung Fu' (Stotts, 2009). In a contradictory double narrative we find him urging non-violent student Takan to fight effectively without 'mercy', 'fear' or 'restraint...you must *know* you will hit your target', before advising him: 'Do not seek to take life' (Fukui, 2008: 156). Another pupil, the malicious manipulator Edward, after deceiving his mentor into providing him with lethal combat skills: 'Umasi had bought his sob story...this compassionate fool had ate [sic] it all up, and in return had provided him with invaluable information...Umasi had already given him knowledge that could make him more powerful that the Mayor himself' (Fukui, 2009: 298), is well on the way to achieving this ambition before Umasi, recognises his error and feels compelled to intervene. Although he expresses remorse, 'killing hadn't come easy for him' (Fukui, 2008: 377), Umasi's grim dispatch of the malign Edward remains an ironically indifferent affair: 'Umasi drew his sword back, then plunged it neatly into Edward's injured shoulder. Another scream of agony echoed throughout the room...'We don't have much time...' Umasi said softly as he dropped behind Edward and deftly twisted his right hand to break his wrist (*ibid*.: 374).

In contrast to Todd's horrific murder of the Spackle, Umasi's humorously grotesque dispatch of his erstwhile protégé, dilutes and celebrates, rather than critiques the sickening violence and horror of this act. In a scene infused with carnivalesque comedy, the young 'hero' insists on his passivism, even as he removes his enemy's head:

> 'I'm not your killer...Remember I once told you. Unbridled ambition leads to self-destruction.'
> 'You're giving me a headache,' Edward protested.
> 'Then it's time for me to put you out of your misery.' Umasi sighed. 'Beforehand, I'd like to apologize. I always deplore ending lives and yours is no exception.'
> Umasi removed his foot from Edward's chest and brought him to his knees, grabbing his blond hair to bend his head forward.
> 'There are other ways of curing a headache...If something harmful is attached to you...'
> Sever it,' Edward finished breathlessly
> Umasi brought his sword down in one quick stroke, striking Edward's neck at a joint. Edward's head rolled across the floor...Blood splattered Umasi's drenched clothes, as he stood there contemplating the magnitude of what he had done, of the life he had taken (*ibid*.: 375).

The contextually conventional moral stance expressed in the hero's overtly articulated reluctance to kill or 'end lives' is simultaneously contradicted by the flippant and light hearted tone of this commentary. Carnivalesque emphasis on the humorous and grotesque, in effect, creates a sense of ambivalence by foregrounding the contrary nature of Umasi's views. Whilst, his attack, unlike Todd's, may be validated in heroic terms (recognising his culpability, Umasi, has acted to prevent further bloodshed), I would argue his uncertain stance provides a greater challenge to young adult fiction norms, because this heroic ambivalence remains unresolved.

The final book, *Truancy City*, sees Umasi swayed by his step-father's arguments and after he commits suicide, Umasi actually replaces the erstwhile villain as Mayor. In this role, the young peacemaker uses his influence to support General Iris's vicious and brutal treatment of students on her draconian 're-education programme'. He attempts to justify his actions to his sceptical ex-lover, the albino, as being necessary to ensure the City's future: his sister Iris has warned him that the city will be wiped out by greater government forces if order is not rapidly restored:

> [The albino] cocked her head: 'You attacked the Truancy, Umasi. You never attacked the Educators, never disrupted their system, never tried to undermine it. Your nature wouldn't allow it. You love order.'
> 'I fought with Zen because he was killing people!'
> 'As if he had any other way to change the City.'
> Umasi frowned: 'Even if I did have a preference, so what? So what if after hearing my father's motivations I agreed with him over Zyid?...I'm trying to salvage what's left of their war-a war that would never have happened if Zyid hadn't overreacted!'
> ...'Listen to yourself!...You sound just like the old Mayor and you're making the same mistakes as him too! Umasi, I saw enough of what happens in those camps to make me sick' (Fukui, 2012: 289).

In this final volte-face, Umasi yet again compromises his own stance and, at the same time, ironically legitimates his repentant brother's early push for armed youthful revolt.

Like his fellow protagonists, then, the young hero, although educated, well-intentioned and likeable, is not a character whose words and behaviour the reader can ever rely on or trust. His indefinite and qualified reassurances on the closing pages of the trilogy, unlike the final pages of *Chaos Walking*, suggest only ongoing uncertainty and provide little clarification or resolution of moral theme:

> Umasi then thought about the government and its misguided leaders...Umasi did not know when or if his path would ever cross with theirs, but if that day ever came he knew there would be a reckoning...Umasi sighed, wondering if any good had come out of the saga that he and his brother had begun four years earlier. Then he remembered the countless citizens who had been saved by the combined sacrifices of so many.
>
> Those survivors would now be united in that shared sacrifice, and in the end they might be wiser for it all...He believed they would be. Humanity did after all have a great propensity for meaningful education - perhaps

I would argue, that this irresolution when aligned to the texts' ambivalent double narrative, suggests something more unsettling and indeterminate than Ness's subversive and complex, but fundamentally moral and responsibly didactic works. In *Chaos Walking*, graphic cinematic violence, although shocking, is clearly positioned as an unambiguously negative and destructive force for both victim and perpetrator. Todd, Viola and the young Spackle 1017, as they grow to understand this, learn to recognise the benefits of compromise and the necessity of working towards reconciliation and peace. In this respect, the author's didactic intention is clear: 'What is important to me in *Chaos Walking*...is the complexity of a person...that you are at one time many contradictory things...You are going to mess up but that is not the point; the point is how you react to it, how you fix it, how you grow from it' (in Jones, 2011: 23). In her critical analysis of Collins' *Hunger Games* and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993-2012) series, Rachel Fentin (2012) referencing Carrie Hintz (2003), argues that the teenage hero of new millennial young adult dystopias is required to achieve this progression whilst retaining qualities of the innocent child: 'According to Hintz, "Good citizenship within the ideal society (or in opposition to the dystopian society) is figured as a process of both achieving the autonomy of adulthood and keeping the clarity of vision held by a child"' (in Fentin, 2012: 16). This is certainly true of Ness's

young hero Todd who ultimately gains the strength to resist coercive and corrupting external influences, that is, Noise and the Mayor's mind-control, without sacrificing his innate childlike vision and goodness. The mayor tells him:

> More than any man I've met, Todd, you *feel*...that makes you powerful, Todd Hewitt. In this world of numbness and information overload, the ability to feel, my boy, is a rare gift indeed...You're the one I couldn't break, Todd. The one who wouldn't fall. The one who stays innocent no matter the blood on his hands (Ness, 2009: 457).

So, although Ness's complex young protagonists are radical in their capacity for cruelty and physical brutality, their fundamental goodness and moral development to adulthood is, in the end, a conventional and familiar one which confirms childhood as innocent: '"Why do you become a man here at thirteen?" she asks... "That's how New World's always done it...Aaron always went on about it symbolizing the day you eat from the Tree of Knowledge and go from innocence to sin"' (Ness, 2008: 228), and youth as a liminal or transitory phase; a rebellious condition 'needing resolution' (Fentin, 2012: 21). Fukui's ironically gleeful carnivalization of violence, on the other hand, challenges conventional narratives of progression linked to a clearly defined moral path. Umasi's inconsistent and unstable commitment to peace, emerges from his studious nature and love of order, rather than any untainted or 'natural' childlike goodness and like the understandings of his violent co-protagonists, is repeatedly questioned and re-evaluated in response to what others say and do. Although growing weary and experiencing self-doubt and distaste, for instance, Zen, Takan, Cross, Iris and Noni, nevertheless continue to be exhilarated and/or empowered by brutal action and revolt. Equally, Takan's determination to kill Zen in revenge for his sister's death, repeatedly waivers in the face of the Truancy leader's words and commitment to his cause, before this original intention is finally fulfilled: 'It was in that moment...that Tack realised Zyid was right after all...Tack suddenly wondered what sort of City it was, where a boy like Zyid could command such power and be so right...and yet so wrong' (Fukui, 2008: 264). At the same time as being damaging, violence in the young writer's work, then, persists as a potent and liberating force. As in *Chaos Walking*, then, we can identify a dialogic quality

in Fukui's work. That is contradictory voices are heard by individual characters and the reader sees how this acts as a shaping force on each. 'One undergoes "becoming" or maturation by selectively assimilating others' perspectives' (Robinson, 2011a). In contrast to Ness's texts, however, this is imagined as a continuous and unfinished rather than a *finalizable* process; contradictory voices, in the young author's work remain unresolved or 'unmerged into a single perspective' (*ibid*.).

Thus in an echo of Banner's narratives, we see borders between childhood and adulthood becoming blurred. Indeed, in this particular power fantasy there is often little distinction to be made between child/teenage rebels and ferocious adult oppressors, other than their 'cause'. As Kleffel observes, Takan learns to 'question and fight; he becomes a force to be reckoned with. His sister Suzie, is charmingly but not cloyingly sweet...Zyid and his compadrés are violent and ruthless enough to be just as disturbing as their autocratic opponents' (2008). As a consequence, the Mayor's cartoonishly villainous child-hating sidekick, Enforcer Rothenberg, is finally forced to acknowledge that 'children' are not all the same: 'Rothenberg was startled by the voice-it belonged to a child! And yet...There was an undercurrent of cruelty, an unspoken promise of brutality...Rothenberg was only just beginning to understand how different children could be' (Fukui, 2009: 325).

3.5. What's Love got to do With It?

This fierce resistance to 'nostalgic' notions of naïve and separate childhood and youthful progression is reinforced in Fukui's address of romance and first love. The young author's empowered female protagonists like Ness's hero Viola, disrupt romantic gender alignments by frequently taking the lead. However, I would argue that a more fundamental challenge to young adult romance narratives is suggested by Fukui's representations of inconsistent and unselfconsciously sexual relationships which repeatedly diverge from the anticipated romantic paths. The powerful Umasi, for example, is advised and or guided by his lover the

elusive, unnamed albino in one-to-one combat as well as in bed. Although the two develop a close friendship which becomes love and she knowingly becomes pregnant by Umasi during their time together, 'I knew what I was doing' (Fukui, 2012: 111), this romantic heroine has no desire for any long-term alliance. When Umasi declares his love for her, the albino tells him kindly that his sheltered and pampered life as the Mayor's son and his time in education have made him too immature as a partner and indicates her preference for an independent life: 'She smiled..."I'm glad I met you."/ "But not glad enough to stay?" She glanced back at him and her eyes though dry, were sad. "No, Umasi" she said quietly, "not glad enough to stay" (Fukui, 2009: 272). The two lovers thus part and, indeed, do not meet up again until four years later when, after again seducing him, the albino tells Umasi he is a father and urges him to abandon warfare and save their now three year old child; As Mayor, her ex-lover is the only person who can guarantee the boy's safe removal from the now devastated war-torn City. Despite her heartache at parting with them both she, once more, chooses independence over domesticity and everlasting love. Refusing to compromise her integrity, she continues to support the movement opposing Umasi and his Government's violently oppressive re-education scheme. As in Banner's texts, then, teenage love in Fukui's stories, is not romantically enduring and cannot conquer all[5].

Indeed, for this couple, conventional romantic fulfilment is permanently denied. When Umasi, in compliance with his mistress's wishes, later boards the Mayor's escape shuttle to flee the doomed City with their son, the heroic albino is unexpectedly shot and killed whilst, in the company of her adoring protégé Cross, she attempts to save the City people's lives. The albino's confident sexuality and insistent independence, then, disrupt conventions of the female *bildungsromen* which Fentin identifies in the young adult dystopian genre: 'some aspects of the antiquated infantilization and desexualization of grown female heroines in Gothic romance are extremely relevant to the narrative of the young adult female

[5] The unconventionally pragmatic and irresolute relationships in Banner's fantasy works inevitably unsettle the didactic linear narratives of development inscribed in Pullman's ultimately idealised account of first love. Will and Lyra's final decision to part is a heartbreakingly necessary and life-preserving moral choice. Their love for one another, is an enduring one which, it is implied, will sustain them throughout and even beyond worldly life: 'I will love you for ever, whatever happens. Till I die and after I die...And when they use our atoms to make new lives, they won't just be able to take one, they'll have to take two...we'll be joined so tight' (Pullman, 2000: 526).

experimenting with romance' (2012: 34). In Collins' *Hunger Games,* for example, Fentin observes that the female hero Katniss is allowed romantic freedom only when: '...she has excuses that preserve her from seeming forward...Katniss, as a romantic heroine, is seen as attractive and desirable due to her innocence and lack of interest in romance' (*ibid*.: 35). This sexualised innocence can certainly be detected in *Chaos Walking*, where Ness's young hero Viola is similarly subjected to the male sexual gaze, imagined intermittently through Todd's Noise and that of other male characters whilst she herself, remains 'unsullied' by any equivalent or responding sexual response. Her somewhat chaste desire, the product of appropriately enduring and morally committed romance, is expressed after their love is consummated with a single kiss, 'And I pull myself towards him-/And I kiss him-/And it feels like *finally*' (Ness, 2010: 458).

Innocent youthful sexuality in young adult dystopias, however, is not always assured. In Rosoff's *How I Live Now*, for instance, the female hero Daisy's longing for and delight in sex with her cousin Edmond is overtly expressed: 'Sometimes we fell asleep and then woke up to finish where we'd left off...And sometimes we had to stop, just because we were raw and exhausted and humming, humming...with something we didn't even have the strength left to do anything about' (Rosoff, 2004: 59). Nevertheless, underlying this taboo-breaking behaviour, a sense of innocent romance and youthful mystique prevails. When left to their own devices, after her Aunt Penn's departure, for example, we see Daisy, Edmond and his three siblings enjoy the freedoms of their rural idyll: They 'drag provisions, blankets and books up to the lambing barn...and enjoy camping in the robust manner of Enid Blyton and Eleanor Graham...These children are innocent' (Craig, 2004). And although this young heroine's love for Edmond is, initially at least, subversively physical, it is at the same time, a magical and naturally intuitive 'transcendental' love: As Judith Franzak points out, 'From the first time they meet, Daisy senses that Edmond can read her thoughts. Later when they are separated, she draws upon their psychic connection by achieving a transcendendent state...he can read her mind and she can, at times, see what he sees' (2009: 38). Once they have this idyllic 'childhood brutally ripped from

them' Daisy is compelled to grow up: she 'is forced out of her selfishness' (Craig, 2004) and develops a steadfast, mature love for Edmond who is left psychologically scarred by his experiences of war. Like Viola, who at the end of Ness's trilogy devotes herself to a desperately wounded and comatose Todd, Daisy, too, commits fully to the care of her 'injured' love. So, despite the overt sexuality, Rosoff's romance, like Ness's, ultimately celebrates a nostalgically imagined, morally enduring and transforming first love which whilst denying the possibility of perfect adulthood, nevertheless offers positive reassurance for the future through the redemptive power of love. Indeed, many adult critics and authors insist that the 'best' young adult dystopias, in contrast to their adult counterparts, 'seek a path to a better way of living, or at least contain a redemptive strand that counterbalances their more violent plot lines' (Lloyd in Bradbury, 2012).

Whilst acknowledging the sexual inexperience of some of the male protagonists, the fractured partnerships in Fukui's texts, by contrast, imagine something far more uncertain and prosaic. The protagonist Floe in *Truancy City*, for instance, loves the Militia leader Cross, but at the same time declares her love for and, indeed, becomes lover to their likeable compatriot Sepp. The female protagonist Noni experiences a similarly unconventional and unsettlingly inconclusive 'dual' love. After being rescued and mentored by the Truancy leader Zen, who identifies strength not victimhood in her ability to survive - 'Someone had mistreated this girl...It was surprising really, that she was still alive/She was tougher than she looked...In time she might become physically formidable' (Fukui, 2009: 110) - a grateful Noni develops a powerful and subservient devotion to him. As in Banner's texts, however, the familiar romantic framework is subverted and exposed as a negative and unhealthily self-destructive one which destabilises Noni's emotions and thwarts her ambitions and aims. Running alongside, this obsession with her mentor is her more conventionally reciprocated love for Takan. Although he usurps her role at Truancy, her partnership with him is one in which she plays the mentor and frequently takes control: '"Everything's wrong!" Tack wailed thrashing wildly. Tack felt a pair of hands firmly restrain him, pressing

him down to the floor...Noni held his gaze and then cupped his face in her hands. "There are people depending on you...Don't let us down"' (Fukui, 2008: 281). Despite their deep affection for each other this too, however, proves an unconventionally uncertain love in which Takan's vacillating desire to avenge his sister Suzie's death and Noni's obsession with Zen and later his killer (ironically Takan), take precedence over any romance: 'Umasi's words struck Tack like a hammer blow to the head...Noni would die for Zyid./Would he die for Noni?/No, Tack realized, he had unfinished business on Suzie's behalf' (Fukui, 2008: 344). When the two are romantically reunited whilst fleeing the City at the end of the trilogy, their future as a couple is far from assured in 'happy ever after' or quixotically romantic terms: 'for now...they were content to be each other's light in the darkness' (Fukui, 2012: 379).

3.6. Following their own Path

Fukui's carnivalized action and romance narratives, then, not only challenge but actually overturn nostalgic assumptions about childhood goodness/innocence and unquestioned progression *away* from rebellious youth. On the contrary, in the *Truancy* trilogy naïve and innocent childhood is emphasized as being the product of a totalitarian state which through an oppressive social/education system seeks to stifle rebellion, independence and imaginative thought. Schools never show:

> ...the responsibilities of adulthood. Any real attempt to act like an adult is deemed uppity and met with punishment...rather than encouraging maturity by exposing children to a mature environment, rather than have them work alongside adults, schools instead create this bizarre and unnatural scenario. They are festering cauldrons of social malaise for students to stew in until the system finally deigns to release them, forever altered by their unhealthy ordeal (Fukui, 2012: 128).

In contrast to Ness's texts, education here is a constraining and damaging rather than empowering force. The 'vagrant' albino, who has been denied education, is significantly more mature, wise and self-reliant than the educated, bookish and inexperienced Umasi. So, liberated from the school system, Fukui's young protagonists are no longer subjected by the 'adult' imposition of 'romantic' child. In Fukui's own words: 'I wanted to redefine the word, to shatter expectations of

what you think of as a "child". When you think of "child," you think of something immature, but you could show a world where, in fact, the opposite is true' (Fukui in Schwebel, 2010: 71).

In this sense, then, the teenage writer's novels acknowledge childhood and youth in a way that adult-authored texts do not. As Fentin points out, whilst seeming to celebrate young adult culture and the complexities of youth, many young adult dystopias are 'riddled with pressures to grow up' and leave adolescence behind:

> ...the young adult narrative is expected to fit into the adult genre constraints which devalue the unique young adult period. The Bildungsroman especially, as a genre focused on coming of age and achieving adulthood, emphasizes the importance of exiting adolescence and privileges adulthood at the expense of the young adult experience (2012: 23).

Roberta Trites in her exploration of power and repression in adolescent fiction, also notes this 'delegitimization' in young adult texts which encourage the young 'to quit being adolescents themselves, to become more like the insiders, the adults' (2000: 79). As indicated above, Todd and his fellow protagonists move from radical but innocent childhood and rebellious youth to become more like the wise and trustworthy adult mentors: Spackle leader Sky and Todd's step-father Ben. Fukui's young protagonists, on the other hand, have an autonomy which allows them to follow their own morally uncertain and un-prescribed course. In their indeterminate, unstable world, students mentor each other and conventional adulthood is a blinkered state to be resisted rather than aspired to or striven towards: rebellion must happen 'now, while we're still children. If we wait too long then we'll become them...students need to secure their own freedom...to demonstrate their own strength' (Fukui, 2009: 75). In the final chapters, parents and the adult Enforcers join the ultimately united youth's resistance movement before being led from the doomed City by the teenagers and children organising the citizens' escape: 'Over the past week Noni had volunteered for more missions than anyone...While Cross and Takan mostly plotted from the front lines, Noni preferred to put herself in the field every chance she got. This had earned her the respect of her subordinates, even the former Enforcers' (Fukui, 2012: 303).

Thus, Fukui's representations interrogate official young adult narratives more effectively than the older authors' works: 'The general focus on teaching and shaping the reader in young adult literature is compounded with the cautionary tale element of the dystopian novel to create an extremely didactic impulse in these novels' (Fentin, 2012: 41). Fukui's Truancy trilogy, by contrast, unselfconsciously celebrates and even inhabits modern media forms to resist and break free from literary containment and oppose adult control. Peopled by a series of characters continually re-inventing themselves, the young author's dystopia, with its dizzying scene shifts, constantly altering perspectives, inexplicably shifting alliances and disorientating timeframes, I would argue, channels an immediate youthful perspective through its radically modern approach. Lecturer Sara Schwebel notes this contemporaneity in her assessment of Fukui's work and praises the young author's ability to 'articulate his frustrations' with the world in which he is growing up:

> As I read, I marvelled at the "modernity" of Fukui's novel – the way multicultural characters were a given, girls fought alongside boys in hand-to-hand combat, and cinematic forms merged with ceramic swords that harkened back to medieval codes of knighthood. The books read like a videogame...As my students are quick to point out, there are gains and losses when a novel is the product of a fifteen-year-old's imagination and sixteen year old's editing skills. But it is impossible not to recognize Fukui's tremendous accomplishment. And his audacity. We have heard innumerable critiques of No Child Left Behind and Zero Tolerance over the past few years. Fukui, however, has done something about it. Too young to vote, too level headed to drop out of school, he wrote a book that forces adults to sit up and listen (Schwebel, 2010: 73).

In his interview with Schwebel (2010), Fukui stresses his belief that the young adult perspective is crucial to this sense of immediacy and relevance: 'I set a goal to finish the Truancy series while still a teenager. If I had waited until I was out, I would never have been able to do it...Even after spending a year or two out of high school, you forget the bad things' (Fukui in Schwebel, 2010: 74).

As Alison Waller points out in *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism,* it is possible to argue that contemporary media forms are often more powerful than official voices in 'representing ideas of what adolescence constitutes because of their pervasiveness in modern society and their special relevance to teenage

culture' (2009: 7). Certainly, through their representations of twenty-first century media, authors like Ness, Collins and Rosoff, have been able to imbue their stories with a contemporary relevance and broad appeal. This undoubtedly results in more shockingly 'coarse' and overtly challenging images than those depicted in more conventional children's/young adult fantasy texts but, as demonstrated, the employment of familiar literary frameworks and unifying narratives reflect a didactic imperative which, in the end, reiterates humanist values reflecting adult understandings and concerns. As Waller notes, 'Teenage fiction is not about teenagers actively creating their own culture but rather about allowing them to absorb it from an adult point of view' (*ibid*.: 10). Whilst it may be difficult for the adult author to resist reproducing official narratives or resorting to moral didacticism when writing young adult texts, his/her success in this project is inevitably compromised because 'absorption', of course, is neither a straightforward or simply passive one-way affair. As Fukui's 'un-literary' intertextuality suggests, the diverse and multiple alternative discourses accessed through new media, allow for differing and opposing subject positions to be offered and/or taken up. Indeed, Fukui shows us that in the hands of adept and 'savvy' young users themselves, new media, like Bakhtin's carnival, can provide equally potent forums for opposing dominant values and norms: Bakhtin 'examines the manner in which ancient traditions of the *carnival* act as a centrifugal force promoting "unofficial" dimensions of society and human life' (Allen, 2005: 22). In effect, the levelling potential of the popular - access 'to the internet...has changed...normal power relationships between adolescents and adults' (Fentin, 2012: 21) – results in an environment where the conventionally subordinated and less mediated voice of youth can be heard.

The first two chapters of this study, then, have foregrounded how realist discourses, to a greater of lesser degree, disrupt monologic narratives of young adulthood embodied in traditional 'other worlds' fantasy frames. Chapter Four will go on to consider the potential for resistance when this particular generic configuration is reversed, that is, when narratives grounded in the identifiably real world incorporate elements of the fantastic and/or surreal.

Chapter 4: Embrace of 'Other' in The Hybrid Text

4.1. Crossing Over: Back to the Future

The final chapter on texts in the mixed-fantasy category will comprise a study of award winning author David Almond and much praised writer Helen Oyeyemi. In their fiction we find a blending of the real with elements of the fantastical or supernatural, which has inevitably been aligned to magic realism, a mode that frequently involves the perspective of socially marginalized or "politically...culturally disempowered" people (Bowers in Latham, 2006: 10). In Oyeyemi's case, this involves a troubled and alienated Nigerian/English child growing up in a London suburb, while in Almond's fiction, children/adolescents growing up in England's post-industrial north east, 'an undiscovered country in literary terms' (Almond in Page, 2006). Whilst Don Latham (2006), Rachel Falconer (2009) and others refer to Almond's mixed genre writing for children and young adults as 'magic realist' fiction, Pat Pinsent (2007), in her analysis of religious representation in children's novels, prefers to define it as part of a more singular 'fantasy realist' mode expressing religious integration. In *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, Alison Waller notes similar distinctions, which mark out Almond's approach: in magic realism 'impossible happenings are incorporated into a world view that the characters - if not the reader - find natural or acceptable', whereas in the fantastic realist mode the protagonist does not expect the consensually impossible to happen: 'when it does it is beyond their ordinary lived experience' (2009: 21). In effect, the fantastic realist mode Waller associates with Almond, and others, acknowledges a 'discrepancy between the expected and unexpected' (*ibid.*), a definition I would suggest, might equally be applied to Oyeyemi's debut text *The Icarus Girl* (2005) written when she was just seventeen years old. In her postcolonial analysis of the young author's work, Chinenye Okparanta observes:

> The narrative, in what would, perhaps, be classified by Western scholars as magical-realist mode, but which Oyeyemi clearly links to traditional Nigerian belief in the 'magical' power of twins, remains ambiguous as to whether the unexplained phenomena that occur are a result of magical power, [or] a psychological imbalance on Jessamy's part, or are simple explainable occurrences that take on added meaning because of the heightened emotional state of the protagonist (2008: 202).

Imagined in a contemporary 'realist' setting, Oyeyemi's novel, like Almond's, draws on myth to incorporate elements of the fantastical envisaged through the young protagonist Jessamy's increasingly chilling encounters with a mysterious 'invisible' friend she first meets on a visit to her mother's family home in Nigeria. Oyeyemi's employment of a hybrid genre to explore themes of culture, isolation, difference and so on, creates a sense of the uncanny which in common with the older author's stories, finds mystery 'rooted in the tangible, myths amid mundanity' (Johnstone, 2005). This commonality, when aligned to each author's emphasis on the culturally-socially marginalised child/adolescent, inevitably invites a postcolonial approach: in employing fantasy and realism 'to write about a marginalized people and place, Almond is joining a long tradition that includes Latin American, Indian, and African American writers just to name a few' (Latham, 2006: 10). In *Memory and Magic* (2006), Latham notes that in texts such as these generic hybridity, integration and 'otherness' are inextricably linked.

In this chapter, then, a productive intersection of Bakhtinian and postcolonial concepts will be employed to explore themes of socio-cultural otherness and how they challenge narratives of age and identity in traditional children's literature. I shall go on to consider what this embrace of the 'other' has to say about the integration of children's and adults' fiction. Sandra Beckett (2009), Falconer (2009) and others, for instance, hail Almond's novels for their challenging content and dual audience appeal: 'the search for meaning has no age limit' (Beckett, 2009: 268). Marketed to an adult readership, Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, on the other hand, is repeatedly 'recommended for young adult libraries' (Hron, 2008: 28) and categorized as literature for teenagers in both critical and popular review.

In his review for *The Telegraph*, Patrick Ness, for instance, suggests that *The Icarus Girl*: '...isn't an adult literary novel at all. I can easily see [it] appealing to an intelligent young teen. This isn't an insult; a sensitive and brainy teenager has written a novel for other sensitive and brainy teenagers' (Ness, 2005).

4.2. The Lost Child: Integration of Other

The familiar literary frameworks and unifying narratives identified in the works of accomplished adult authors, Philip Pullman, Patrick Ness, Meg Rosoff and so on, working in the parallel and dystopic fantasy modes, undeniably run through much of Almond's young adult fantastic realist fiction too. Narratives of maturation in his early works, such as *Skellig* (1998), *Kit's Wilderness* (1999/2008) and *Heaven Eyes* (2000), for instance, are eerily unsettling and radically disruptive of genre, but although enjoyed by readers of all ages, I would argue, they employ a tone and structure which ultimately confirms them in the category of children's and young adults' texts. However, as Benedicte Page points out, Almond's novel *Clay* (2005/2006) is 'a notably darker novel' which marks a significant change:

> Almond's books have always been marked by a sense of wildness and danger, as children on the brink of adolescence face up to the powerful forces within themselves and in the wider world. Yet experiences of suffering - even in *The Fire–Eaters*...have until now been contrasted with the vividness of youth and hope. *Clay* offers little of that optimism (Page, 2005).

In their media reviews, Page (2005), Anne Johnstone (2005) and others attribute this development to the author's own increasing disillusionment: 'I used to be optimistic but how can you talk about human advance when Rwanda happens, when people are practically having their heads sawn off on television and George Bush is bombing children?' (Almond in Johnstone, 2005). This shift in perspective would seem to be reflected in the novel's melancholic tone, unconventional indeterminacies and sometimes morally nuanced stance. As a consequence, I would argue, that it pushes at boundaries of age-category and genre in ways his previous works do not. Set against the backdrop of a changing socio-cultural environment Davie, the key protagonist in *Clay*, in an echo of the

author's own youth, is a young altar boy growing up in 1960s Felling, a town situated in what the author describes as the culturally marginalised north east: 'the places and people who inhabit my stories have historically been pretty much excluded from mainstream English culture. To many cultured southerners the northeast [of England] has been seen as a pretty barbaric place' (in Latham, 2006: 10).

As noted above, Almond's themes have a resonance with postcolonial theories and of relevance here is Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the 'Third Space', a heterogeneous environment in which cultures come together and where questions of marginalization and identity are addressed. This liminal world of 'in-between' is a site of tension from which authoritative discourse may be challenged and hybrid identities formed and owes much to Bakhtin's understandings of language and subjectivity: 'Bakhtin's dialogic vision of human consciousness, subjectivity and communication is based...on a vision in which language embodies an ongoing clash of ideologies, world-views, opinions and interpretations' (Allen, 2005: 28). Emphasis on competing languages and socio-cultural perspectives, in effect, foregrounds the shifting, intertextual quality of meaning and the hybrid nature of identity itself: 'It is the peculiar standpoint of "outsideness" which makes something new of the other's perspective by merging it with one's own' (Robinson, 2011a). In *Clay* this process of integrative development is initiated by the arrival of a sinister and mysterious outsider Stephen Rose. Stephen's appearance in Felling heralds a series of extraordinary and apparently supernatural events which disrupt and threaten Davie's daily life. As in Almond's earlier works, then, it is from within a liminal cultural and psychic environment that the protagonist Davie transitions from boyhood to young adult man. In her analysis of doubling or haunting narratives, Waller (2009: 55) notes the singular nature of this identity achievement in the young adult fantastic realist mode:

> The hero or heroine is isolated from any sense of wider community by their personal experience of the fantastic, a pattern that is in direct contrast to the communal atmosphere of magic realism or pure fantasy...In fantastic realism, the teenage protagonist alone encounters the supernatural or

> impossible within a realist context and in such a space it is fruitless to appeal to society...Identity achievement here is all about an individual quest to discover a stable sense of self in the face of unsettling or decentred fantasy.

In Davie's case, this isolation occurs as a consequence of his alliance with Stephen who is sent to live in Felling with his aunt 'Crazy Mary' after his 'dad dropped dead' and 'mother went mad' (Almond, 2006: 7). The new arrival's strangeness and difference are soon established through the gossip and rumour which begin to spread. Davie's school-friend Geordie, for instance, remarks on Stephen's 'weird' behaviour 'in the garden at night, staring at the moon' (*ibid*.: 9) and later informs Davie that the Rose family are: 'crackers...the whole damn lot of them. Always have been...So me dad says...Stephen's granda was the biggest nutter of the lot...He did hypnotism tricks in bars in Cullercoats and Whitley Bay' (*ibid*.: 19). This sense of mystery and otherness is reinforced when the two friends actually meet Stephen 'in the flesh'. After serving as altar boys at the funeral of an elderly parishioner, Davie looks up and notices the 'waxy' skinned Stephen 'standing among the graves' (*ibid*.: 15) where he informs them he has been searching for clay to sculpt figures with, from freshly dug graves:

> ...'from deep, deep down.'/He ran his hand over the clay...he quickly pressed three holes and a slit: two eyes, a nose, a mouth. He held it up and rocked it in the air. He made it talk in a squeaky voice...'You didn't say hello to it...Go on, say hello to it.'/... 'Hello,' I murmured./ 'Hello, Davie,' squeaked the clay. 'Thank you for believing in me' (*ibid*.: 17).

This violation of consecrated Christian burial ground for the transgressive creation of 'new life' is infused with the spirit of Bakhtin's carnival which affiliates physical degradation to regeneration and rebirth: 'Degradation...means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time' (Bakhtin, 1984: 21). This is a familiar metaphor for growth and transition in Almond's fictions. The life/death juxtaposition, in this case, signals the demise of Davie's childhood and the beginning of his reformation from boy to man.

Although wary, the younger Davie and Geordie decide to befriend the 'scary' (*ibid*.: 23) outsider in the hope he will frighten off their enemy, the physically terrifying bully 'Mouldy', a decision they soon have cause to regret when Stephen visits their cave/den in the disused quarry, ironically named 'Braddock Gardens'. After firing their imaginations with stories of saints 'who lived in caves like this...in the wilderness' (*ibid*.: 53) and an angelic childhood vision foretelling his 'special' role, Stephen unsettles the unsure Davie with a whispered threat: 'one day...I'll mebbe show you something that'll scare you stiff. It'll scatter your doubts...You'll be petrified, Davie. Your soul'll bliddy crack' (*ibid*.: 60). Threats and menace become a frightening physical reality soon after when Stephen, suddenly and without warning, runs out of the cave and stabs 'Skinner', a member of Mouldy's rival Protestant gang. Despite the shock and fear this engenders, Davie, nonetheless, continues to feel irresistibly drawn to the strange older boy.

The threat of an eerily sinister 'other', of course, is not a new theme in Almond's children's and young adults' fiction:

> As a troubled orphan he [Stephen] reminds us of the Whitegates children in *Heaven Eyes*, particularly the wounded and cynical January Carr. As a shadow figure, a dark character to whom the main character feels a strong, inexplicable attraction, he recalls Askew in *Kit's Wilderness* (Latham, 2006: 119).

As Latham goes on to point out, Stephen proves a much darker and 'edgier' character who, unlike Almond's previous protagonists 'experiences no catharsis and no redemption' (2006: 119). In contrast to *Kit's Wilderness*, for instance, where the feared bully John Askew is guided on a creative journey of redemption by the central character Kit, in *Clay* the opposite occurs when Stephen leads Davie on a transgressive creation quest in which the younger boy succumbs to temptation and 'falls'. In the end, 'Stephen nearly destroys Davie' (*ibid*.). That is not to suggest that their relationship is an uncomplicated dichotomy between corrupted child and good; 'evil' in *Clay* cannot be understood simply as an unambiguously separate or external supernatural force. Stephen's alignment to the fantastic, undeniably positions him as a mysterious and demonically evil threat:

> Dracula's characteristics...parallel those of Stephen Rose. Both have vague histories and indeterminate identities. During the course of *Clay* Stephen tells various stories about himself. Claiming at one point to have been visited by an angel and called to a life of Christian service. At another, he claims to have killed his father...Stephen and Dracula have hypnotic powers that allow them to keep their victims under control...Stephen, like Dracula, is a parasite, sucking life from his victims both literally and figuratively (Latham, 2007: 222).

But, at the same time, allusions to his unhappy family background indicate an underlying distress: 'His eyes shone with tears and rage..."And damn me mother and all," he said. "If she had her way she'd have me bliddy dead!"...He started to cry./"Tell nobody!...Bliddy nobody! Nobody!"' (Almond, 2006: 91). Knowledge of Stephen's disadvantaged social and familial circumstances and emotional vulnerability suggest more down-to-earth reasons for his 'vagueness' and inconsistency when talking about his life, and point to 'realistic' motivations for his malice and discontent. Falconer notes this potential in her analysis of *Clay*:

> ...interpreted naturalistically, Stephen's behaviour is destructive, rather than supernaturally demonic. As he recalls, his mother always believed that he had not been naturally conceived, but appeared in her womb like a demon. So one might interpret his conviction that God had abandoned the human race, and that he himself possesses demonic powers, as the psychological displacement of bitter feelings towards, as he puts it, his 'mental' mother (Falconer, 2009: 143).

Dialogic interaction between contesting socio-cultural discourses and voices, then, offers different interpretive possibilities and highlights the shifting and hybrid nature of meaning and identity. The 'good altar boy' Davie, for instance, with 'his lovely mam and dad' (Almond, 2006: 201), although likeable and naïve, is not altogether free of taint: 'whoever or whatever else Stephen Rose may be' he also 'reflects a part of Davie's psyche' (Latham, 2006: 120). Davie, for example, fantasises about vengeance on Mouldy and self-consciously participates in transgressional acts. When Stephen persuades him to assist in the creation of a creature - 'A bliddy monster. A thing that'll terrify Mouldy...even kill him for us, if that's what we tell him to do' (Almond, 2006: 131) - Davie mindfully steals the communion wafer and wine which he believes is required for the task: 'I'd stolen the body and blood of Christ and I wouldn't give them back. I'd go further into

the darkness with Stephen Rose' (*ibid*.: 145). So, Stephen's influence over Davie, it is suggested, is not entirely a consequence of mysterious manipulation or irresistible mesmeric control. Their alliance is something Davie himself is instinctively drawn to and actively seeks out: 'Stephen Rose was something strange and new, something that had been sent to me, something that stood before me as I grew from being a boy into a man. I couldn't turn away' (*ibid*.: 127). Nevertheless, as Waller notes, in the fantasy realist haunting narrative one 'double' is inevitably positioned 'as other with less desirable – if not totally evil - teenage qualities' (2009: 67). In this example, Stephen's cruel, ruthless and cynical pursuit of power, at any cost, is less acceptable than Davie's youthful desire to test boundaries - 'For Davie the older boy represents a wilder, more dangerous mode of being that exceeds Felling's ordinary norms' (Falconer, 2009: 142) - and protect himself from Mouldy and his gang. Indeed, it is Davie's intrinsic good nature and sensitivity which make this transition from boyhood such a disturbing and dangerously disruptive one: a horrifying 'moral awakening' which threatens his sense of sanity and self.

As he creeps away from his home in the dark of night, Davie symbolically leaves the known and familiar world of childhood behind - 'Davie who wants his dad to stamp downstairs and stop him...Davie who closes the door behind him when none of this happens, Davie who steps out alone into the night' (Almond, 2006: 170) - and goes to meet Stephen in the den/cave. Here in a secret candle-lit ceremony the two boys 'like the ancient priests...finding their powers in the wilderness' enact a symbolic, spiritual journey back to the mythical roots of creativity and human life, 'to uncover the source of the impulse to create and destroy' (Falconer, 2009: 145). Together they mould and seemingly animate a huge and 'beautiful' clay man: '"Live", I whisper. "Live and move."/And our voices rise again, and begin a weird wordless song...I lean right over him and breathe into his nostrils like God when he formed man from the dust of earth, and we whisper weirdly and we stand and sway and we start dancing' (Almond, 2006: 183). In a carnivalesque parody of Christian practices and beliefs, then, the empowered children not only arrogate (adult) ecclesiastical authority, but by

regressing to a more natural, 'precivilised' state apparently usurp the role of God the Creator himself. When the creature actually begins to rise, however, Davie flees in terror. This dread turns to horror when he hears the next day that Mouldy has fallen to his death in the quarry. Assuming that the creature he helped to create is responsible, Davie is consumed by guilt and fear which is intensified by Stephen's gleeful confession that it was, in fact, he and not the 'creature' who killed Mouldy. Experiencing a sense of trauma and dislocation, Davie finally 'outlawed...from the community of Felling' (Falconer, 2009: 148), undergoes a near dissolution of self: 'I lie on the bed and the newness deepens and the darkness deepens, and I am truly not myself, I am truly gone, I have disappeared from the world' (Almond, 2006: 240).

His subsequent 'recovery', in the context of young adult literature, proves to be an unconventionally partial and uncertain one which is set in motion by acknowledgement of his creature 'Clay': 'there he is, down below, huge round face...*I am here master'* (*ibid*.: 243). With Clay plodding beside him 'like a massive faithful pet' (*ibid*.), Davie embarks on a tour of Felling, during which he finds himself reconnecting with the community from which he has become estranged. He begins to recognise its significance in who he is and how he came to be: '"This is the graveyard...Many of my family are here. My ancestors". I show the ancient leaning graves. I show the Braddock graves..."We're brought here when life has gone from us...When we're nothing but a body, we're put into the earth//Dust to dust," I say' (*ibid*.: 249). In the spirit of carnival, then, acknowledgement of physical death and mortality revives Davie's sense of community and continuity with the past: '[grotesque realism] makes no pretense [sic] to...independence of the earth and the body. We repeat: the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character...a people who are continually growing and renewed' (Bakhtin, 1984: 19). As I shall demonstrate in my analysis of Oyeyemi's text, this carnivalesque emphasis resonates closely with postcolonial notions of 'homeland' as a place of 'healing return' (Harris in Okparanta, 2008: 188) as Davie's 'reconnection' enables a reformation of self. In effect, it gives him the strength and motivation he needs to

resist Stephen's manipulations and fuels his desire to live his own life: 'I'm just a boy...You're just a lump of clay. I can't do this. I want nowt to do with you and nowt to do with Stephen bliddy Rose!...I've got my own bliddy life to live!...Goodbye Clay...Die, Clay. Please die' (*ibid*.: 254).

Davie, of course, can never simply resume his old life, or 'pick up where he left off', as Mouldy's death and his collusion in it remain ineradicable and irreversible facts. And after thwarting Davie's attempt to kill Clay, Stephen, in their final encounter, forces his erstwhile acolyte to face up to this fact.

> You think you're so good, don't you?' He says. 'You that butchered that dog. You, that wanted Mouldy dead. You, that helped to make the thing that helped to kill Mouldy. You, that was about to kill Clay. Well, there's goodness for you. There's an ordinary life for you...And here's a thought for you to ponder in your ordinary life...If you'd not run back like a baby to your bed that night, your Mr Mouldy, could be with us still (*ibid*.: 266).

When Stephen kills Clay and disappears from Felling, then, fear and culpability continue to shadow Davie's life: 'In my dreams, Clay stirred again. Stephen kept on whispering in my ear...Mouldy kept on falling and falling to his doom. I wanted it all to be finished. But it wouldn't leave me and I couldn't forget' (*ibid*.: 272). In a break with his earlier works and indeed Waller's fantastic realist mode where protagonists ultimately achieve cohesive identity after 'a series of fantastic ontological "tests"' (Waller, 2009: 57), Davie can only partially escape. That is, the unacceptable other, the dark force, who threatens unified identity is contested and overcome, but, in the end, not fully expelled in either a physical or psychological sense. After the police question Davie in the wake of Stephen's 'escape', his elliptical and mendacious response has morally questionable consequences, which leave Davie wishing Stephen were dead. Davie not only recognises the continuing external threat of 'other', but the ongoing need to contest dark other within himself: 'I keep on watching waiting and at times am filled with dread. There are whispers he must be dead...When I find myself wishing those things are true, I have to curb my thoughts' (Almond, 2006: 294). With the encouragement of his girlfriend Marie, Davie does, of course, make a tentative recovery and, in the end, achieves catharsis by 'writing his story down'.

However, the suggestion that Davie ultimately 'turns materials of darkness into light' (Latham, 2007: 223) is, as Falconer (2009), Johnstone (2005) and others suggest, to underestimate the tone of melancholy and irresolution that prevail: 'There is less of a sense in this book that if you are brave, great forces will come to your aid. At the end of *Clay*, Rose escapes to wreak havoc elsewhere and Davey [sic] is disillusioned. So is Almond' (Johnstone, 2005).

And the author's self-confessed disillusionment, as indicated, is significant in this respect, because as Falconer points out, Davie's *bildungsroman* may be read as a metaphor for the society of Felling itself. In the same way that Davie has to re-negotiate or re-form his identity in the irresistibly alluring yet unpredictable and often dark adult world embodied in the older Stephen Rose, Felling too has to redefine itself in a post-war landscape poised between an 'industrial past and an uncertain future'. In '"Where are you going now?": Themes of Alienation and Belonging in the North-East in Children's Literature', Robert Lee notes that in this world 'the tantalising promise of escape' from such things as 'poor...housing and difficult, dangerous work' can conceal something which may be worse: 'There are pitfalls in de-industrialization and urban regeneration that can swallow whole communities and entire cultures' (2012: 193). Maria's comments to Davie as they walk through the disused quarry, point up this ambivalent threshold state:

> We came through to the clay pond and stood beside it and looked around and I knew what Maria meant when she said it was beautiful.
> 'There's talk they're going to fill it in,' she said. 'They're going to bulldoze the gardens and knock the last of the old houses down and fill the quarry in and build a new estate...They're cretins...They'll call the new streets Pretty Place and Lovely Lane but they'll not see how they've smashed a bit of paradise' (Almond, 2006: 112).

So Felling, like the naïvely optimistic altar boy Davie 'You're too innocent, Davie...You think everything's nice and everybody's nice' (Almond, 2006: 46) must awaken to a 'different and more complex reality...Felling in the 1960s, according to Almond, was characterised by an optimistic socialism, this political idealism was about to change' (Falconer, 2009: 143). A cynical and disillusioned Stephen tells Davie it is a world from which God has 'nicked off, Davie. He

abandoned us. About 1945, I reckon...mebbe a bit earlier. You know: war, concentration camps, gas ovens, atom bomb, all that stuff. Enough to drive anybody away' (Almond, 2006: 223). Stephen's dark actions and pessimistic vision, then, set up a questioning of creative and scientific 'progress' and unthinking acceptance of rationally determined truths. As Latham (2006), Falconer (2009) and Johnstone (2005) note, Almond's reworking of *Genesis*, *Frankenstein* and the Golem legend - in Jewish mythology, a clay man brought to life to protect his master - suggests a:

> ...theme of science and technology gone awry...Set in the 1960s *Clay* recalls the...Cuban missile crisis and nuclear destruction...surely it is not too much of a stretch to equate the monster, who is created for the purposes of protection and revenge, with nuclear weapons which were developed for similar reasons. Moreover, the novel was written during the war in Iraq and its aftermath and the proliferation of terrorist attacks, and Almond has acknowledged the influence of that conflict on both *The Fire Eaters* and *Clay* (Latham, 2006: 118).

Intertextual allusions, in effect, acknowledge an unconventionally unstable adult world in which contesting possibilities and tensions are not simply 'resolved'. On the contrary, the future Almond imagines is one in which humankind's potential for destruction fuels and shadows creativity and rapid socio-cultural advance: 'the genius of the book is that, without so much as mentioning stem-cell research or human cloning, it raises some fundamental questions about how far artists and, by extension, humankind should go when playing God' (Johnstone, 2005). Love, goodness and creative endeavour, in this text, are not inevitably the solution. They do not provide unambiguous redemption for *all*, and a re-formed Davie must learn to live with the negative as well as the positive possibilities of environment and self. As in the dialogic novel, then, engagement with conflicting 'languages and utterances' in *Clay*, foregrounds 'not only social division' but the 'radically divided space of discursive formations within an individual subject' (Allen, 2005: 165). In this context, positive progression is inevitably compromised: 'Davie emerges at the end of the novel bruised and weary, into a world where he now knows the potential for evil within human nature' (Page, 2005) and, of course, within himself.

The complex and challenging content and structure of Almond's *Clay*, in reflecting the author's own less optimistic perspective, expresses a challenge to conventions of age-category and genre not evident in his earlier works. I would suggest that this disturbance to definitive classification arises from and is reinforced by the author's personal investment in *Clay*. Indeed, the implied impact on content and structure is further emphasized by the effect it has on the novel's narrative style and address. In *Clay*, for example, we see the generically subtle fusion of realism and fantasy noted by Pinsent (2007) and Waller (2009) as distinctive in Almond's work, further complicated by Almond's semi-autobiographical approach: 'a little private journey taken for myself' (Almond in Page, 2005). That is, whilst previous works draw heavily on his past, in this novel, Almond is no longer, 'outside the frame looking in. In Clay he crosses the final frontier...Though it remains a fictionalised account...it was, he says "cathartic", flushing something out of his system. If anything it makes that sense of being alongside him in the story even more vivid' (Johnstone, 2005). In this borderline territory, between auto-biography and fiction, between Davie/David, the voice and language of author/narrator and young protagonist become subversively merged. As Falconer notes 'the linguistic register of the narrator appears to be that of an adolescent, although...the polished and pared down style has also been described by reviewers as "ageless"' (*ibid*.). As a consequence, adult readers may enter the text 'of *Clay* on a par with the implied adolescent reader' (Falconer, 2009: 140). I shall argue that this empowering linguistic hybridity reflects a previously unachieved or unattempted synthesis of the author's 'othered' childhood with his present cultural self. That is, from an environment reminiscent of Bhabha's Third Space, there emerges a new double-voiced discourse which integrates old voices and new.

4.3. Re-imagining the Past

In attempting to return to and re-imagine his 'marginalised' youth, Almond is confronted with the same difficulty as that addressed in postcolonial narratives. As John Lye (1998) notes 'there are complexities and perplexities' in the ways the

colonized country can ‘reclaim or reconstitute...identity in a language that is now but was not always one’s own...One result is that the literature may be written in the style of speech of the inhabitants of a particular colonized people or area, which language use does not read like Standard English’. And indeed, in the ‘relentlessly Tyneside’ *Clay*, Almond employs more local dialect than in any of his previous works: ‘I’ve been moving towards that and I thought “what the hell, just do it, really use the Tyneside language”’ (in Page, 2005). As a consequence, the generically conventional Standard English of the narration is in this novel frequently punctuated by the non-standard, marginalised dialect of the author/narrator’s north eastern youth: ‘“Why don’t you nebb off back to Whitley Bay?” said Geordie./“Aye,” I said. “Nick off, Fishface”’ (Almond, 2006: 2). So, rather than the predominantly ‘writerly’ tones we have come to expect in Almond’s work, which ‘Western culture associates [with] Standard Usage’ (Allen, 2005: 168), in *Clay* the ‘barbaric’ other breaks through to speak for him/herself in non-standard dialect. This carnivalesque privileging of the popular or unofficial foregrounds the double-voiced quality of the ‘othered’ subject’s language and speech; how the writing of ‘marginalized groups, is always a mixture of available discursive possibilities’ (*ibid*.: 160). At once childishly coarse and comic, the protagonists’ dialect is, at the same time, an intrinsically literary one which references ‘monsters’, ‘devils’, ‘saints in the wilderness’, ‘angels in the clouds’ and so on. Nevertheless, tensions remain between written and spoken word: ‘it can become very difficult for others to recognise or respect the work as literature...for us who are raised in a culture with strong aesthetic ideals to accept’ (Lye, 1998).

In *Clay*, however, the narrator’s free-indirect commentary produces a new kind of discourse through an empowering synthesis of the two and, in doing so, not only opposes limiting stereotypes but gives voice and status to ‘regional, working-class boy’:

> I felt the mud under my feet and the thorns of the wild roses and brambles on my legs. It felt warm and humid after the breezy street, like the year was further on in here. Sluggish flies buzzed around us. There were years of graffiti on the quarry walls. She said her dad used to come here for soil and daffodil bulbs. Like everybody’s dad, I said. Mebbe all the gardens in

> Felling had bits of this garden in them. Everything was coming into leaf. Blossom was breaking out. There were primroses and daffodils and fancier flowers that were grown from ancient Braddock seeds...I knew what Maria meant when she said it was beautiful (Almond, 2006: 112).

Imbued with the landscape, culture and language of his youth, this rich and self-consciously hybrid commentary effectively merges national/regional, literary/non-literary and adult's/child's voice to achieve a levelling or an ageless, classless register which strives to address different categories of readers on equal terms.

Almond's encounter with self in the Third Space, then, leads to new understandings which impact on the novel's content and style:

> Stephen has shown me something. When I was writing the early parts of *Clay*, I was thinking 'You know, Stephen's going to turn out to be OK, he'll be redeemed.' And then as I went on, I re-alised [sic], he wasn't, he was sticking by his guns. So I suppose for me there was a kind of growing up, as there is for Davie in the course of the book' (Page, 2005).

At the same time, this allows him to express himself as a writer in new and more challenging ways. It may be argued that these factors combine to produce a new style of crossover writing which represents something more complex and challenging than the popular categorisations of such fiction suggest, that is, as children's novel with adult readership appeal (Beckett, 2009: 5).

4.4. No Place like Home

Like *Clay*, Oyeyemi's *Icarus Girl* addresses questions of marginalization and identity formation from within a series of borderlands recalling Bhabha's heterogeneous Third Space: in effect, 'how subjects are formed in-between' (Allen, 2005: 165) and, as with Almond's work, the novel's complex intertextuality poses problems of reading in terms of age-category and genre. Published as adult fiction, Ness (2005), David Robson (2005) and others, nevertheless review the *Icarus Girl*, as literature for young adults and teenagers, whilst Madeleine Hron (2008), Åse Lundell (2010) and many more, read it as an adult text. For them, its mature themes and cultural complexity cannot 'be deemed or dismissed as "kiddie lit"' (Hron, 2008: 29). Such ambivalence is perhaps

inevitable given the novel's seeming resistance to the conventions of both adult and teenage literature. In 'Abjecting Hybridity in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*', Jordan Stouck, for instance, notes that 'the author's use of a child protagonist conflicts with certain concluding and perspectival conventions of the adult novel' (2010: 95), whilst in their critical analyses Hron (2008), Lundell (2010), Okparanta (2008) and Diana Adesola Mafe (2012) identify the novel's transgressions of generic conventions in traditional postcolonial texts:

> *The Icarus Girl* examines cultural clashes and hybridization in...a space...explored by several third generation writers: that of immigration' at the same time, 'its focus on the child, its second-generation perspective, and most notably its paranormal elements...resist many of the elements of the immigration novel...There is no notable journey of assimilation or acculturation..Jess never completely fits in' (Hron, 2008: 35).

Whilst Oyeyemi's dispassionate omniscient third-person narration does not suggest the semi-autobiographical engagement noted in Almond's first-person account, the expression of cultural hybridity in the novel has been linked by John Freeman (2005), Karen Campbell (2005) and others to Oyeyemi's own childhood: 'Oyeyemi may perhaps be working through or reflecting her own psychological problems as immigrant child. During her childhood in Great Britain, Nigerian-born Oyeyemi was socially outcast, clinically depressed and even suicidal' (Campbell, 2005). It would seem at the very least, then, that the author has drawn from her own experience and, consciously or otherwise, given voice to personal desires and concerns: 'I was really surprised that the novel became a story about Jess's need to be whole because I had no idea it was a preoccupation of mine' (Oyeyemi in Okorafor-Mbachu, 2005). Indeed, I shall go on to suggest that this chronological/emotional proximity results in a distinct and radically unsettling voice and perspective, 'this strange, grief-charged narrative remains believable because of the directness of its voice' (Smith, 2005), which goes beyond the transgressions identified in Almond's more 'distanced' personal account.

Like Almond's protagonist Davie, Jessamy/Jess (hereafter Jess) Harrison is a sensitive and imaginative child whose lone encounter with the supernatural occurs within a 'realistic' setting. In *The Icarus Girl*, this setting is a contemporary one alternating between Jess's daily life in Cranford, a suburb of London, and visits to her mother's Nigerian family home. In contrast to the likeable Davie, however, Jess from the start is a friendless and withdrawn child whose feelings of resentment and disconnection as a 'half and half' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 13) dark skinned girl, are amplified by her mother Sarah's contrary expectations and beliefs:

> Sarah...excludes Jessamy from her Yoruba heritage, but at the same time she refuses to tell Jessamy any Western fairy tales and only tells her Yoruba folk tales. Sarah finds Jessamy's quiet behaviour, her reserve and her self-chosen seclusion from the company of other children peculiar, and believes it to be unnatural, because 'In Nigeria...children were always getting themselves into mischiefs, and surely that was better than sitting inside reading and staring into space' (Oyeyemi 6) Yet she does not approve when Jessamy is 'getting into mischiefs', and since Sarah is working from home, Jessamy is often told not to disturb. Thus Sarah, inconsistently, encourages Jessamy to read and stare into space (Lundell, 2010: 7).

The confusion Jess experiences as a consequence of this inconsistency, leaves her struggling to understand how she should be or where she 'fits in' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 13): 'Uncle Adam and Aunt Lucy arrived to pick up Dulcie...They looked like a picture-book family: blonde man, blonde woman, cute little blonde child. Jess hummed to herself under her breath; she did that sometimes when she was confused' (*ibid*.: 144). Unable to verbalise her feelings, she is prone to tantrums and screaming fits, challenging behaviour which fuels tensions in the family home. Jess's mild and sanguine father Daniel, for instance, whilst strongly disapproving of his wife's harsh and disciplinarian approach, repeatedly fails to intervene effectively and ultimately lashes out at Jess himself: Daniel hit 'his daughter with such force that she jerked backwards with a whole body snap'(*ibid*.: 232). Finding refuge in isolation: 'Jess preferred cupboards and enclosed spaces to gardens' (*ibid*.: 4), Jess seeks catharsis through books and the written word. She loves reading Shakespeare and poetry as well as classic children's texts. A serious, intense child with sophisticated 'adult' literary tastes, Jess has an

advanced intelligence which seems the greater mark of her difference from classmates in the culturally mixed-environment of her school. Here she has, against her will, been moved up to the next year. Jess's sense of dislocation and frustration, then, emerges from her mixed-heritage status, intellectual precociousness and disempowered status as a child. As prize winning author Ali Smith observes in her review: '[*The Icarus Girl*] goes further than an analysis of cultural and personal displacement to suggest that no childhood is ever normal, that the strains between parents and children will inevitably break you whichever you happen to be' (2005). In contrast to Almond's young protagonist, then, Jess is solitary and unsettled before the appearance of her 'other worldly' friend.

In an attempt to settle her daughter and bring her 'out of herself' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 6), Jess's mother Sarah, arranges a family trip to Nigeria. In a postcolonial context, this visit may be seen as an attempt to initiate traditional healing or recuperative return and, as suggested, has much in common with the carnivalized narratives of regeneration referenced in Almond's work. In effect, reconnection with past and origins enables recovery and reformation of identity:

> Sarah operates under the assumption (and hope) that Jessamy will arrive in Nigeria and be able to figuratively regain her "missing half". The true meaning of being displaced and unable to claim an originary space is most lucid in Sarah's fantasy and in the vain hope that a return to "home" is the logical response to her daughter's fragmented identity (Okparanta, 2008: 192).

As Okparanta observes, in this instance the opposite turns out to be true, as from the start Jess experiences a sense of estrangement and confusion in her mother's homeland too: the man at the airport desk 'flicked his gaze over her...Had he been thinking, who is this woman who has a Nigerian maiden name in a British passport, who stands...with a white man and a half-and-half child' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 13). Overwhelmed by the sights, sounds and customs of this new environment, Jess feels 'half a world away...alien' (*ibid*.: 29) and unsure of her 'self'. When her grandfather calls her by her Nigerian name Wuraola, for instance, she freezes 'not knowing what to say or do...she knew that Wuraola was her Yoruba name...but Wuraola sounded like another person. Not her at all' (*ibid*.:

19). Unable to form a bond with any of her cousins 'none...was the right age to show an interest in her as a companion' (*ibid*.: 18), she continues to feel isolated and alone until she meets a mysterious young girl, Titiola/TillyTilly/Tilly (hereafter Tilly) playing in the abandoned and unused 'Boys' Quarters' near her grandfather's house: 'otherness or is it sameness? - enters the story in the form of TillyTilly' (Smith, 2005). Delighted to have, at last, found a companion of her own age with whom she can connect: 'With Titiola...Jess finds an equal, rather an omnipotent and omniscient equal' (Hron, 2008: 37) who not only matches but exceeds Jess's knowledge of books '"How come you've read all these books and I haven't?".../ "I haven't read them, I just know what's in them"' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 52).

After a series of exciting and 'surreal' adventures with Tilly, Jess returns to England. Here she finds herself more unsettled than ever until the day her enigmatic Nigerian friend (re)appears unexpectedly at the back door of Jess's Cranford home. Looking plumper, smarter and 'just a little different', she explains somewhat vaguely, 'Me and my parents have just moved into the area' (*ibid*.: 86). Emboldened by this renewed alliance, Jess at last emerges from her isolation and begins to find her 'voice'. As Mafe observes, Jess like the newly released 'Icarus' of the novel's title, begins to 'spread her wings' and 'fly' (2012: 27). In effect, she 'gradually leaves the symbolic confinement of the cupboard and her silence behind' (*ibid*.). She stands up to her parents Daniel and Sarah and her spiteful classmates at school and later composes a poem, something she had previously tried and failed to achieve. Tilly, Jess's link to Nigeria, then, seems to trigger the hoped for restoration anticipated by reconnection with her 'roots'. However, Jess's empowerment is compromised by Tilly's increasingly malicious and unruly acts of vengeance on classmates and family members, ultimately including Jess's own father, as well as her newfound English friend 'Shivs'. Soon, Jess begins to fear as well as relish her friend's dangerous powers and ultimately questions who or what Tilly is and whether she is in fact real: 'she didn't know why it hadn't occurred to her before...they couldn't see TillyTilly. She suddenly felt very small and a little bit scared/ *Is TillyTilly...real?*' (*ibid*.: 150).

4.5. Interventions of 'Other': Crossing Divides

In this context, then, *The Icarus Girl* would seem to be the story of a lonely child and her imaginary friend, the product of a troubled and disempowered young girl's mind; something her psychoanalyst in England suggests is the case. Locating Jess's difficult and aggressive behaviour in her mixed-cultural heritage, Dr McKenzie, the psychologist to whom her worried parents have her referred, tells Jess and her mother: 'It's possible that TillyTilly is an alter-ego, although she could possibly be an internalised imaginary companion...a different side...that comes out when you're scared and angry' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 260-261). However, as Pilar Cuder-Dominguez (2009: 283) points out in 'Double Consciousness in the Work of Helen Oyeyemi and Diana Evans', this Western 'realist' interpretation is compromised by Oyeyemi's importation of the fantastic in the form of atavistic Nigerian beliefs. These become apparent in the wake of Tilly's revelation that Jess had a twin who died at birth:

> Your twin's name was Fern. They didn't get to choose a proper name for her, a Yoruba name because she was born already dead, just after you were born; you have been empty, Jessy, without your twin; you have had no one to walk your three worlds with you. I know - I am the same...But now I am Fern, I am your sister' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 161).

Unnerved by Jess's subsequent demand for confirmation of her 'lost' twin, Sarah makes sense of her daughter's discovery by reference to Yoruba beliefs:

> Jess's mum mumbled something that her father didn't catch...
> 'She knows about her. I don't know how she knows. She's like a witch'
> 'Look, Jess couldn't possibly know'
> Shut up! You don't know Daniel! They know! *They always know*! Twins...they always...Oh my god...she's like a witch...Three worlds! Jess lives in three worlds. She lives in this world, and she lives in the spirit world, and she lives in the Bush. She's *abiku*...The spirits tell her things. *Fern* tells her things' (*ibid*.: 165).

This response from the ostensibly 'Westernised' Sarah, suggests the enduring power of these myths and indeed so great is her anxiety, that she feels compelled to pass on these previously unspoken understandings to Jess: 'In the old days in

Nigeria, people were kind of scared of twins – some people still are. Traditionally, twins are supposed to live in, um, three worlds: this one, the spirit world and the Bush, which is a sort of wilderness of the mind' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 182). Using a book as her aid, she tells Jess if 'one twin died in childhood before the other, the family...would make a carving to Ibeji, the God of dead twins, so that the dead twin would be...happy' and at peace (*ibid*.). The Ibeji statue, in effect, acts as a form of appeasement, a means by which to neutralise or ward off potential harm to the surviving child in a culture where it is believed the death of one twin compromises the other 'because the balance of his soul has become seriously disturbed' (Leroy et al, 2002: 134). Oyeyemi's importation of Nigerian oral myth, then, begins to blur distinctions between, real/unreal, life/death, present/past, other/self, as Tilly may now be understood as a vengeful, dishonoured 'abiku' or spirit child, 'Your twin's name was Fern...I know - I am the same...But now I am Fern, I am your sister' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 161). This interpretation is further complicated, however, by its resonance with the Western doppelganger myth: 'TillyTilly behaves like the vengeful twin that has not been honoured as she should be, in Nigerian belief. But TillyTilly also functions as a gothic alter ego or doppelganger, a double from another, darker dimension, who can play havoc in someone's life' (Cuder-Dominguez, 2009: 283). As Okparanta notes this merging of African/Western myths, not only inverts 'the notion that the "traditional" can only be found within the Third World or that the Western World cannot have its own "magical" phenomena', but at the same time, foregrounds the influence of migrant cultures on the 'host' site (2008: 202).

In common with Almond's dialogic text, then, realist and gothic references offer different interpretive possibilities and signal the potentialities of meaning and self. Tilly is/is not real, is/is not the soul of a lost twin, is/is not Fern, is/is not a projection of Jess's alternative self/troubled mind and so on. And in both novels the dangerous 'other' provides power and knowledge and a link to 'originary' which undermines or, in Jess's case, further destabilises a sense of stability and self. In *The Icarus Girl* this is emphasized by the children's multiple names: '[Jess] from a half-state of incompleteness...finds herself "fragmenting and

becoming double," if not tripled, and she must negotiate the confusing identities of..."FernJess and JessFern" (Hron, 2008: 37), as well as Tilly/Fern, Tilly/Jess and so on.

However, in their accounts of 'recovery' the significance of differences between implied authorial perspectives begins to emerge. I shall go on to argue that the older author's more distanced recollections of regional childhood and home recall traditional postcolonial notions of identity formation grounded in '"recovery" of the past...which when found will secure our sense of identity' (Hall, 1990: 436), whilst Oyeyemi's representations serve to emphasize the difficulties associated with such a return. In this context, her narrative may be said to align more closely to Stuart Hall's alternative account, a '2nd way' of thinking about cultural identity that recognises the past and homeland - in his analysis of Caribbean diaspora, 'Africa' - whilst simultaneously resisting essentializing Western accounts: 'We must not collude with the West which, precisely, normalises and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past....it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered' (1990: 437). As I shall demonstrate, this double discourse of resistance and recognition in Oyeyemi's work articulates a more radical challenge to conventional understandings of identity in children's fiction than that identified in Almond's work. And this, in part at least, may be said to represent the younger author's more contemporary youthful perspective and gendered womanist stance.

4.6. A Womanist Perspective

Often used as a means for analysing Black women's literature, the concept 'womanism', first coined by Alice Walker (1979), is seen by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985), Renee Martin (2010), Kathryn Manuelito (2006) and others to embrace broader understandings than those offered by a 'white' feminist approach:

> ...womanism is unique in its interrogation of oppression and otherness from multiple sites: womanism 'is not just feminism for women from minorities; it is based in our spirituality...and a desire to support both men and women. While womanism at its heart is pro-woman, it is also about understanding the...value of all people of colour... (Martin, 2010: 2).

As a consequence, in its opposition to patriarchy, it must be racially aware: 'Black women writers are not limited to issues defined by their femaleness but attempt to tackle questions raised by their humanity...the womanist vision is racially conscious it its underscoring of the positive aspects of black life' (Ogunyemi, 1985: 68).

Evidence of this positive 'underscoring' may be detected in Oyeyemi's representations of Nigeria and Nigerian family life. Sarah's childhood home, for example, turns out to be a large gated compound in an affluent suburb of Lagos. Here, her extended family continue to work and live under the 'rule' of her powerful and wealthy father Gbenga. Comprising several houses as well as servants' quarters, this compound is an altogether more extensive and prosperous environment than Jess's small and cramped English home. Such a comparison not only opposes images of rural poverty and starvation which dominate Western media but, at the same time, counters the narratives of subordination which Ogunyemi (1985), Hall (1990) and others identify in both fictional and non-fictional accounts: 'demeaning positions to which black people have been assigned and which they still hold in many parts of the world' (Ogunyemi, 1985: 68). A man of authority and racial pride: 'Here. Here is where kingship lives. I am a princely man, and my children therefore should be proud and strong' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 27), Gbenga's pronouncements, far from 'underscoring black subordination' (Ogunyemi, 1985: 68) suggest an empowering alternative view:

> This is how your mother really is....I sent her to learn medicine in England...She hasn't even been there six months when she writes me a letter, telling me that she is now studying English. English Literature! What job do you find in Nigeria that requires knowledge of all these useless words?..Words describing white people, white things, every single story spun out in some place we don't exist! It has no value; in my eyes, it is to confuse (Oyeyemi, 2005: 26).

Gbenga's disdain for useless 'white' words, then, enacts a carnivalesque privileging of 'subordinated' ethnic tradition and ancestral past, a privileging Manuelito sites as central to the womanist view: 'Euro-Western emphasis on literacy has no bearing on how...people of color [sic], see themselves or how they understand their identities. In their own...spaces people of color [sic] have always been visible, vibrant and worthy' (2006: 168).

However, running alongside these positive representations in Oyeyemi's narrative is the womanist critique: in effect, a counter acknowledgement of and resistance to the contradictions and suppressions of the Nigerian culture Gbenga and his family life represent. The grandfather's forceful defence of cultural heritage and purity, for instance, seems somewhat ironic in the wake of subsequent revelations that he himself practices Christian religion and keeps and treasures classic English texts 'thick tomes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 50). As Lye (1998) notes: 'otherness includes...the values and meanings of the colonizing culture even as it rejects its power to define'. As a consequence, Gbenga's atavistic Yoruba beliefs often merge confusingly with the teachings of his 'hellfire' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 54) Christian church. Soon after exhorting his daughter 'to pray...Think on Jesus! (*ibid*.: 288), for example, he declares his intent to fetch the 'witch doctor' to help his 'possessed' granddaughter Jess (*ibid*.: 293). In her analysis of contemporary immigration novels Hron likens fictional representations of paradoxical paternal authority to the behaviour of certain Nigerian dictator generals, 'Buhari, Babangida', and so on 'who also styled themselves as "papa" or "baba kabiesi (father of the country), and who espoused imported religions, either Islam or Christianity' (2008: 34).

Jess's status as outsider or uninitiated and beloved grandchild, however, allows her to challenge and undermine this authority in ways her cousins, aunts, and mother do not. This youthful womanist resistance to colonialist and patriarchal discourses - 'for the black woman racism and sexism must be eradicated together'

(Ogunyemi, 1985: 70) - is one which resists relegation of the male. When her grandfather criticises Sarah for her betrayal of homeland, for instance, Jess ingenuously interrupts and question his views:

> ‘Words describing white people, white things, every single story spun out in some place we don’t exist! It has no value; in my eyes, it is to confuse...’
> ‘Confuse, dissemble, obfuscate,’ Jess whispered.
> ‘What?’
> ‘Dissemble and obfuscate – they’re two different words, same meaning to confuse.’
> Silence. Jess heard her mother snort with laughter, then retreat, choking down the corridor to the kitchen..../‘Anyway, listen. It made me...I couldn’t ...’...
> ‘But didn’t you want her to be happy?’...
> ‘I was frightened that some enemy had laid a curse on her head...’
> It couldn’t have been that bad,’ Jess ventured....
> ‘She didn’t just take her body away from this place – she took everything...But I must be vain. She dedicates two books to me, and I forgive her.’
> Jess laughed, then stopped when she realised that her grandfather wasn’t laughing with her (Oyeyemi, 2005: 26-28).

The grandfather’s indignant outbursts and Jess’s placatory questioning represent a carnivalesque transposition of child/adult, male/female hierarchies which foregrounds inconsistencies in the former’s repressive gender/cultural stance. These ironies are given further emphasis when it becomes clear he denies access to ‘traditional’ narratives himself. As Mafe notes, books written by two ‘father figures of Nigerian literature, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka’, are kept locked in his study, a place ‘representative of a kind of privileged knowledge off limits, especially to little girls’ since Jess’s female cousin inadvertently damaged two of her grandfather’s treasured books. This ‘reminds us of the male-dominated literary tradition of Nigerian writing and the “elder” grandfather’s role as gatekeeper of that tradition’. Jess and Tilly, however, break into this prohibited space, an act of empowerment and resistance, which unlike Sarah’s betrayal, opposes patriarchal authority at the same time as valuing and preserving cultural heritage and past. That is, rather than destroying or burning down the library, as she and Tilly have the power to do: ‘[Tilly] took Jess’s hand and guided her slowly past each shelf. She passed the candle over the rows of leather-bound and

hardback books, bringing the flame so close to some that Jess's breath caught in her throat' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 50), the girls content themselves with reading extracts from Gbenga's treasured books and 'whirling around' in the grandfather's swivel chair' (*ibid*.: 52). In effect, Jess enacts a womanist, or what Mafe identifies as a postcolonial, feminist encroachment and appropriation, rather than negative subjugation or annihilation of male tradition and power. The 'intelligent black woman writer, conscious of black impotence in the context of white patriarchal culture, empowers the black man. She believes in him' (Ogunyemi, 1985: 6). And indeed, for all his formidable and oppressive rule, Jess's grandfather can be seen as a positive presence in both his daughter's and granddaughter's lives. Despite his objections to her chosen topic of study, for instance, he has nevertheless, sanctioned and financed Sarah's travel and higher education, whilst his relationship with Jess sees him 'reach out' and assist her 'in ways that the other family members never fully contemplate' (Cuder-Dominguez, 2009: 284).

Oyeyemi's complex intertextuality, then, leads to a disorientating double-voiced discourse which simultaneously privileges, resists and critiques. This inevitably compromises conventional understandings of 'healing' homeland as for Jess Nigeria, much like England, proves a site of difference and contradiction which poses problems of access, most particularly for the mixed-heritage 'girl' and 'child'. I will argue that, as a consequence, her ultimate cultural/spiritual 'recovery' resolves in a more unsettling and dissonant hybridity than that suggested by Almond's text because, 'If identity does not proceed, in a straight, unbroken line, from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?' (Hall, 1990: 436).

4.7. Dynamic and Elusive Homeland

After becoming aware of the increasingly voracious Tilly's intention to inhabit her body and steal her life, Jess's behaviour grows ever-more erratic and destructive. As in *Clay* this sense of threat and 'possession' culminates in a vengeful and, in this instance, *near*-fatal attack by Tilly/Jess on Jess's new

companion ‘Shivs’ after she has angered them both by betraying Tilly’s existence to her father - Dr McKenzie. In an ambiguous and dreamlike encounter at Jess’s house, Shivs is sent ‘dancing’ or ‘rolling, *bump, bump, bump,* from upstairs to down’ (Oyeyemi, 2005: 276). In contrast to Davie, after the death of Mouldy, Jess is not consumed by guilt or self-destructive remorse: ‘Jess stopped screaming Siobhan was all in a heap on bottom step...Only now could Jess tell her that it was OK that she couldn’t keep a secret; she was a good friend now that she was going to die’ (*ibid.*: 273). She is, however, forced to face the consequence of her actions soon after, when on a return visit to Nigeria a hostile Tilly confronts her and claims her reward: ‘Time to swap!..I did my share, I got everyone you wanted me to. I want to be alive too!”... “You shouldn’t have come back here,” TillyTilly told her before Jess fell (*down far, as her father might have said before he got better*)’ (*ibid*.: 285). Jess’s fight to reclaim her stolen identity is symbolically enacted in the fabled third world of the ‘Bush’ where she finds herself after a serious car accident leaves her hovering between life and death. In contrast to Davie’s wilful psychic journey in pursuit of ‘primeval truth’ or creative origin (Falconer, 2009: 145), Jess is thrust into a bewildering and terrifying world of ‘beings that cannot be categorized’, a space ‘profoundly unsettling to concepts of identity’ (Stouck, 2010: 98). She is only able to resist fatal submission to Tilly with the assistance of her twin sister Fern, whose timely arrival, it is implied, coincides with Gbenga’s placement of an Ibeji doll in Jess’s hospital room: “It was a wilderness here and Jess had been getting lost and beginning to despair that she’d ever find her way out until *someone* came and bore her away on their back, away, but still not home’ (Oyeyemi, 2005: 319). Jess, emboldened by this reunion with her ‘lost’ half, at last feels able to confront Tilly and reclaim possession of her ‘self’. However, in contrast to the male protagonists of traditional ‘Bush’ tales, who ‘emerge in their original form’ (Mafe 2010: 33), Jess’s return to cultural homeland and originary culminates in a new and uncertain hybrid self:

> ...there was a sister girl now, one who could now call herself Wuraola...Jess charged onwards...smiling ferociously, smiling transfigured...It was TillyTilly who had been calling her, thinking that she could win again...Jess ran at her...(she didn’t hear the silent sister-girl telling her that it wasn’t the right way, not the right way at all)...

> and
> hop,
> skip,
> jumped
> into Tilly's unyielding flesh...back into herself. Jessamy Harrison woke up and up and up and up (Oyeyemi, 2005: 302).

In the context of the *Icarus Myth*, which the story's title recalls, Jess may be understood as heading for a fatal fall: 'Jess ran at her... (she didn't hear the silent sister-girl telling her that it wasn't the right way, not the right way at all)'. This reading seems to be supported by the closing citation of 'Praise of the Leopard', a Yoruba poem referencing 'Beautiful death' (*ibid*.: 303). The narrator's earlier observation, however, 'Jess fell (*down far, as her father might have said before he got better*)' and the novel's closing line 'Jessamy Harrison woke up and up and up and up' (Oyeyemi, 2005: 302), offer more complex understandings in line with the womanist objective that 'the black woman must not destroy herself with patriarchy' (Ogunyemi, 1985: 66). Nevertheless, it is clear that in common with Almond's text, the 'other' refuses to be convincingly physically or psychologically expelled. As a consequence, identity remains hybrid rather than becoming reassuringly unified or whole and complete: 'Bakhtin believes that the grotesque is counterposed to the classical aesthetic of ready-made completed being' (Robinson, 2011b). However, in contrast to Davie's subversive transition to a darker adult world, Jess's journey is not a specifically ethical encounter with other, and gives no reassurance that control of self or identity balance has been, or can be achieved. On the contrary, Jess's merging with Tilly raises tensions which appear impossible to resolve.

4.8. Problems of Return

The distinction between Oyeyemi's and Almond's accounts, in part, may be seen to arise from different generational perspectives which, as implied, emerge in each author's representations of 'home'. That is, Oyeyemi's chronological proximity to the places/milieu she represents results in an unsettlingly fractured and discordant

vision, recalling what Salman Rushdie refers to as a realistic 'close up' view, whilst Almond's understandings betray a physical/psychological distance from originary home: 'it would be dishonest to pretend, when writing about the day before yesterday, that it was possible to see the whole picture' (1982: 430). I would argue that what Okparanta (2008), Hall (1997) and others identify as the dislocated migrant's desire to 'invoke a sense of collective history to provide a sense of rootedness' (Okparanta, 2008: 205), in the older author's case is conflated with what Falconer points to as the adult's drive to feel grounded in childhood and past: to 'recover the earliest memories of childhood' in order to provide a sense of psycho-socio and spiritual stability in uncertain and 'disorienting...contemporary life' (2009: 129). As Rushdie observes, the writer who is 'out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in more intensified form' (1982: 429). Johnstone (2005), in her review of *Clay*, for instance, notes how Almond 'gives a sense of being alongside him in the story...This frees us to share his sensation of loss and bereavement, not just for lost people but a whole lost world'. Almond's text, of course, resists the essentialist or 'sentimental' understandings that Okparanta (2008), Hall (1997), Lye (1998) and others caution against. His re-imagined childhood world is, after all, one in which religious rivalry and casual, unthinking cruelty and violence are part of the protagonist's 'realistic' everyday life, as opposed to occurring in some safely distant, or remote and conflict-ridden fantasy world. Nevertheless, Almond's understandings of 'homeland' and future acknowledge a simpler and more socially/morally cohesive, if not unified, past: 'Despite the bully – and he is terrible – there is a feeling of a cocooned community' (Ardagh, 2006). Davie's developmental journey is one which recognises boundaries between childhood/adulthood, self/other, good/evil, present/past and so on and reveals a spiritual source from which identities may be formed. As a consequence, Davie's reintegration allows for the possibility that his transgressive knowledge of creative origins may be positively transformed: 'Davie, through the process of telling his story, begins to recover from the trauma he has experienced' (Latham, 2007: 225). This sense of possibility is echoed in the carnivalesque imagery of Clay's own positive rebirth: 'Clay's remnants...lie there in our garden...Slowly, slowly, he is

being washed into the sandy border, and earth returns to earth. The sycamore seeds and hawthorn berries have hatched and a little forest of saplings grows from him' (Almond, 2005: 293).

Jess's ambivalent reclamation, on the other hand, implies ongoing instability because unlike Davie, she is caught between traditions, cultures, child/adult states, which are themselves hybrid and dynamic, contrary and flawed: 'life is nowhere to be found in its pure, pristine state. It is always-fused, syncretised, with other cultural elements' (Hall, 1990: 437). None are unquestionably accessible or definitively defined. She is part of, yet not and must make sense of self by acknowledging and appropriating ancestral heritage from each, a notion symbolically represented in Jess's occupation of Nigerian and Western mythical male quest roles. Thus, when she invades Gbenga's library with Tilly, she is not only enacting a recognition and encroachment of male-dominated 'Nigerian' tradition but, I would add, her Western heritage too: 'Tilly held the candle..."It's a good poem," she said "Ancestral voices and all that...Do you like it?...It's called 'Kubla Khan'."/Yes, Jess nodded. "I like it a lot"' (Oyeyemi, 2006: 51).

As in Hall's alternative theory, then, Jess must attempt to make sense of her identity in relation to three 'presences', Western, in his account 'Européenne', African or 'Africaine' and the 'New World', that is, the space where cultures meet and collide 'the beginning of...diversity, of hybridity and difference' (1990: 436-438). So, rather than the subversively melancholic blending of self and other resolving in potentially redemptive creativity implied in Almond's account, Jess's dissonant hybridity suggests plural, yet partial and unstable identity 'constantly producing and reproducing' (*ibid*.: 438) itself, of identity in a continuous state of tension, renewal and flux. Despite the distance implied by her dispassionate, third-person narration, then, I would argue Oyeyemi's representations have a sense of immediacy and authenticity, which Almond's 'personal' first person recollections do not. That is, they suggest confusing and fragmented understandings of life in the here and now, in Oyeyemi's case, the perspective of precocious childhood as

it is lived in an ever-shifting, transmigrational, postcolonial age: 'Oyeyemi writes about childhood as if she were not inventing but truly remembering it, not through the distancing lens of time, but as scary...as it really is (Watrous, 2005).

This is not to suggest, however, that Almond's more distanced perspective ultimately replicates the familiar frameworks and unifying narratives identified in adult-authored parallel-fantasy and dystopian texts, or indeed those of his own earlier works. Davie's transition is conventionally linear and ethical and raises important moral questions but, as I have shown, it is not an overtly didactic or traditionally humanist one. Davie's cultural 'grounding', undeniably offers stability and hope to Almond's young protagonist (and, indeed, the novel's child and adult readers) but, at the same time, offers no promise of, or clearly signed pathway to a fully realised or 'unified' adult life. As Falconer notes, to make such an argument would be 'to neutralise many of the disturbing and unresolved aspects of the novel' (2009: 151). On the contrary, Almond's analysis of culture in the Third Space brings worlds/states together in an empowering generic and linguistic hybrid fiction which offers new understandings and strives to achieve an open and democratic dual-address. However, what I hope to have demonstrated is that the differences identified in Oyeyemi's work represent something quite distinct from the form of crossover worked towards in Almond's text. That is, her imagination of mutable states/cultures generates ambivalencies which make her novel difficult to place in terms of genre, and/or specific or implied categories of addressee. In effect, whilst Almond's dialogic engagement with 'otherness' works to bridge the divisions separating children's and adults texts - 'Almond's exploration of the nature of origins of the spiritual instinct may thus play a part in this millennial bridging of cultures, not only between child and adult, but also between secular and religious communities' (Falconer, 2009: 140) - Oyeyemi's new-generation hybrid is unable or disinclined to recognise the boundaries themselves.

My study so far, then, shows how a merging of opposing genres in the focus texts facilitates innovations of structure and content which, to a greater or lesser degree, challenge young adult stereotypes and conventional readership categories. Analysis of texts in Chapter Five will consider whether, in the light of this understanding, crossover potential is compromised by constraints of genre in the young adult realist mode or whether, on the contrary, the identifiably 'real' offers opportunities for a blurring of adult/child boundaries that the mixed-fantasy genres do not.

Chapter 5: Making it Real: Representations of Teenage Experience in the Young Adult Realist Novel

5.1. Boys will be Boys

In the above chapters on fantasy, I have noted clear distinctions between the adult and teenage authors' representations of childhood and adolescence. Indeed, we have seen even in the most radical adult authored texts, notions of innocence and a sense of nostalgia and loss prevail. In this final chapter, then, I intend to consider whether these distinctions are less clearly manifested in the sometimes contentious and often challenging representations of youth emerging in contemporary 'realist' texts for young adults. And if that is the case, might young adult realism, despite the constraints of subject matter, be said to reflect a more fundamental disruption of adult/child reader categories? Drawing on Bakhtinian understandings, I shall explore themes of romance and first-sex in Melvin Burgess's controversial novel *Doing It* (2003) - part of the 'tell it as it is' strand of realism which Alison Waller describes as 'the most recognisable form of young adult fiction' (2009: 18) - and Kody Keplinger's *The Duff* (2010/12). I shall go on to consider how issues of social isolation and marginalisation are imagined in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), and Faïza Guène's novel *Just Like Tomorrow* (2004/2006). These novels would seem to have more in common with the less narrowly focused and literal strain of realism which 'implies an understanding that taboo-breaking does not mirror every teenager's life' (Waller, 2009: 19). With a particular focus on the carnivalesque characteristics of presentation and address in these novels, I intend to identify and assess the subversive elements of their representations and consider how they might impact on their cross audience appeal.

In her analysis of radical young adult fiction Kimberley Reynolds suggests that authors like Melvin Burgess, with their explicit reference to 'sex, sexuality and relationships between the sexes' encapsulates 'one of the most radically changed areas in contemporary children's literature…what was once one of the most vigorously patrolled boundaries separating fiction for adults from that for juveniles has been redrawn…' (2007: 115). Clare Walsh makes a similar observation in her study of Burgess's 'boundary pushing' work: '[Burgess] deliberately sets out to trouble the boundaries between fiction for adolescents and that for adults' (2004: 142). And, indeed, his novel *Doing It*, with the author's approval, has been published and promoted as both young adult and adult text. Given the historic adult sensitivities to which Reynolds (2007) refers, the direct address of adolescent sexuality in Doing It, and in particular, what the author identifies as the neglected area of 'young male sexual culture' (Burgess, 2004: 295), has inevitably proved controversial for some. As children's literature lecturer Lucy Pearson notes, despite Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975) marking something of a turning point in representations of teenage sexuality, 'teens have sex and nothing bad happens...', there are still relatively few 'Young Adult novels which feature healthy sexual relations' (in Vincent, 2013). Amongst those who have and continue to address this deficit is Malorie Blackman (2013); she along with Philip Pullman and others, argues that a more open address of teenage sexuality is not only desirable but necessary for contemporary 'media savvy' or media saturated children and youth: 'youngsters ought to read about sex within the safe confines of a book rather than through "innuendo and porn"...[this] would allow them to process it within a "safe" context rather than turning to damaging and "brutalising" images' (in Furness, 2013).

Despite this growing consensus, a number of critics and authors have taken exception to Burgess's direct and literal approach. Young adult author Anne Fine, for instance, condemns *Doing It* as a damagingly misogynistic and 'grubby book, which demeans both young women and young men...God help the publishers...if they think this tosh is realistic' (Fine, 2003). Burgess counters by insisting that: 'men recognised themselves in it and women found it funny...I think it says a lot

for the sensitivity of teenagers that they have kept the way they really think away from people like Anne Fine' (in Spring, 2003). Are Burgess's graphic representations of contemporary teenage sexuality and culture, then, as subversively 'real' or 'authentic' as he claims and as a middle-age adult writer how is he or, indeed, any adult critic in a position to 'know'? With these provisos in mind, I will attempt to focus on what *relevance* the author's representation might have for contemporary adolescents and what his book's 'radical' content and style of address might offer to readers, young and old.

As indicated in earlier chapters, John Stephens in his analysis of children's texts, identifies how carnival imagery and terminology, what Mikhail Bakhtin terms the 'language of the market place' are used to undermine or subvert 'social authority, received paradigms of behaviour and morality, major literary genres' (1992: 121). This is certainly the case in Burgess's often comic and irreverent re-imaginings of teenage life. Despite a focus on familiar themes, the predominantly male perspective, coupled with the 'profane' language and grotesque imagery of carnival provide a less than conventional account of adolescent romance and love. As Walsh notes: '[Burgess] sidesteps the generic label of "romance", since its challenge to the genre is more radical than merely changing the gender of the implied addressee. The book is...far removed from the cosy conventions of traditional romance' (2004: 145). This is evident from the very start. In the opening pages a key male character, Jonathan, in a game of 'either-or', asks his friends Dino and Ben to consider who they would choose to 'shag' if forced: Jenny 'the ugliest girl in school' or the 'filthy' unwashed 'beggar woman' sitting close by. Jonathan insists that the rules of his game do not allow the beggar woman to be 'cleaned up': 'You'd have to take her as she is...[and] from the front. With the lights on. Snogging and everything. And you have to do oral sex on her too...until she comes' (Burgess, 2003: 1-2). Repelled by the very idea, Jonathan's two friends, nevertheless, discuss what they describe as the 'disgusting' options at some length.

Quoted as evidence of 'filth' and 'misogyny' by Fine, and others, Burgess insists this language and perspective is a long overdue acknowledgement of the way young boys actually talk. And indeed, there is much support for this view. Referencing Deborah Cameron (1997: 59), for instance, Walsh argues that this type of verbal exchange may be seen as the means by which young males can 'construct their heterosexual identity' and express 'solidarity with one another by denigrating women and/or homosexual men' (Walsh, 2004: 146). It is certainly true that the often irreverent and profane musings throughout *Doing It* frame the three boys' friendship, at the same time as emphasizing their more controversial all-consuming desire for and fascination with sex. And, as Walsh goes on to note, the reality of the boys' sexual experience or lack of it, offers an ironic contrast to the misogynistic bluster of the novel's opening scene. It soon becomes clear, for instance, that Dino and Jonathan are desperate to lose their virginity, and neither are sexually confident, whilst Ben struggles in his relationship with a 'predatory female teacher with whom he feels completely out of his depth' (Walsh, 2004: 146). Their journey to sexual knowing or sexual competence, is an often comic one which in the context of children's/young adults' writing controversially acknowledges the physical pleasures of 'filthy, dirty...ugly and beautiful' (Burgess, 2004: 295) consequence-free sex, significantly for girls as well as boys: Jackie falls 'in lust' (Burgess, 2003: 17) as well as in love with Dino, whilst Deborah 'fancied [Jonathan] something rotten' and is surprised and delighted by his sexual advances because 'she never thought she stood a chance' (*ibid*:. 69).

Far removed from the serious, responsibly imagined, physical encounters noted in Philip Pullman's and Malorie Blackman's fantasy texts, where subversive acknowledgement of young teenage sexuality is balanced by an emphasis on mutual love and respect, Burgess's protagonists, most particularly the boys, glory in and relish the idea of sex for its own sake. With an insouciant disregard for conventions of genre and age category, the text of *Doing It* is littered with popular 'lad mag' style references to 'shagging', 'wanking', 'bums', 'tits' and 'knobs' to name but a few. As a consequence, *Doing It* seems to show little evidence of the censoring adult presence identified in the young adult fantasy works. On the

contrary, Dino's first experience of full sex is with an unruly, sexually knowing fourteen year old girl he has just met and is preceded by a farcical inspection of her pudendum which occurs under the bed clothes and with the aid of a lamp: 'It had an amazing spicy, pee-y smell. It was pure sex...it must have been weird for her, with the light on her fanny and me under there examining her. But you know what? I think it turned her on' (*ibid*.: 113). As in Bakhtin's carnival, then, the 'grotesque realism' in *Doing It* offers a parody of idealised first love: Carnival 'highlights the mouth and genitalia, which are "veiled" and "romanticised"'(Higher Education Acadamy, http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk) in traditional narratives of romance. This comic degradation is a bringing down to earth or a levelling process which is seen by the author, Kit Spring and others, not only to remove anxiety through demystification 'comically toe curling scenes make teens feel they are not alone' (2003), but by openly acknowledging sexuality in this manner, to give disempowered and silenced young people a voice: 'If you are 15 or 16 and you want to read about people with sex lives, those people will have to be in their twenties or late teens at the earliest - no one writes for you. The whole entry into adult life is substantially unsupported' (Burgess, 2004: 293). In *Doing It*, then, the author recognising 'there are few secrets from kids these days' (*ibid*.: 293) through carnivalized language, imagery and perspective attempts to provide a narrative with which 'knowing' contemporary teenagers can realistically identify.

The popular new wave of young adult romance novels currently flooding the market, seem to confirm Burgess's contention that there is a desire for greater realism in representations of teenage sexuality amongst the young themselves. Ostensibly less 'grotesque' in their descriptions than Burgess's 'male version' (Burgess, 2004: 296), these stories, collectively known as 'Steamies', nevertheless, offer a female perspective which is equally unabashed in acknowledging the physicality of mutually pleasurable adolescent sex: this 'erotically-charged genre of fiction for teenagers...has been described as "Judy Blume for the *Fifty Shades of Grey* generation' (Clark, 2012), and has led to a 'New Adult' publishing category targeting readers into their twenties as well as

those in their teens ‘nobody can quite agree what constitutes the target age...In the US, it tends to be 18 and over, but the British offerings...are...mostly...for a younger audience aged 15 plus’ (Carlyle, 2013). Very much part of this movement towards more ‘realistic romances that reflect their own emerging sex lives’ (*ibid*.) are teenagers themselves. Eighteen year old Beth Reeks, pseudonym Reekles, who secured a three book deal with Random House publishers after her debut romance novel ‘clocked up 19 million hits online’ (bbc.co.uk, 2013), was motivated by the very issues Burgess highlights. She notes her inability to identify with older characters in conventional romance and expresses dissatisfaction with novels in the ‘fantasy genre, full of vampires and the like...I [wanted] a believable plot with characters and people my age can identify with...Eventually I figured that if there was nothing out there like that for me to read, then I’d have to write it instead’ (*ibid*.). Young Adult author Jody Keplinger indicates a similar drive: ‘A lot of books I read as a teenager, I had no idea how old the author was. The only one I ever read already knowing the author had been a teen when she wrote it was *The Outsiders*...Had I known of other teen authors at the time...I might have jumped on it’ (in Borné, 2010). Written when she was only seventeen-years-old, Keplinger’s first novel *The Duff* (2010/2012), like Reekles’ debut *The Kissing Booth* (2013), is framed as a traditional teenage romance. However, whilst Reekles’ text has a derivative quality which ultimately poses few significant challenges to gendered sexual roles or romantic norms, I would argue Keplinger’s self-consciously feminist perspective enacts a more effective subversion of age category and genre. Indeed, I shall go on to suggest that her carnivalesque inversions and reversals ‘her snarky teen speak, true to life characterisations and rollicking sense of humour’ (Kirkus Review Magazine, 2014), in the end allow more empowering subject positions than the ostensibly more subversive grotesque realism of Burgess’s text.

In the opening pages of *The Duff*, we are introduced to Keplinger’s young female protagonist ‘Bianca Piper’ through whose perspective the narrative unfolds. A witty, wise-cracking narrator, Bianca’s cynical and judgemental outlook is immediately evident as she sits at the bar of the local teenagers’ club ‘looking out

for' her two beautiful best friends Casey and Jessica, whom she describes as 'shaking their asses like dancers in a rap video. But I guess guys eat up that shit, don't they?' (Keplinger, 2012). Disdainful of her friends' perceived naïvety, she is determined to protect them and as always ready to haul them out of the party 'before any of the horn dogs could take advantage of them' (*ibid*.). Her assessment of attractive young women vulnerable to predatory young males is, of course, a familiar one, although in contrast to Burgess's text, abusive and demeaning language is frequently used by and directed at both females and males. When a classmate she describes as 'the most disgusting womanizing playboy to ever darken the doorstep of Hamilton High' (*ibid*.: 6) sits next to Bianca and begins to flirt, she is predictably less than impressed: 'Wesley. Fucking. Rush...Go try your charming act on some tramp with low self-esteem, because I'm not falling for it' (*ibid*.: 5). Like Burgess's 'anti-romantic' hero Dino, Wesley is a physically attractive, arrogant sexual predator who is popular with young women and girls. This is confirmed when in response to Bianca's derogatory rebuttal, he confesses that by flirting with her he is simply trying to attract her good-looking friends:

> ...you, darling, are the Duff...Designated. Ugly. Fat. Friend...And girls respond well to guys who associate with their Duffs...What I'm saying is girls – like your friends – find it sexy when guys...socialize with the Duff. So by talking to you...I am doubling my chances of getting laid tonight. Please assist me here, and just pretend to enjoy the conversation' (*ibid*.: 7-8).

Bianca's outraged response to his misogynist bravado is to hurl further abuse and splatter 'his expensive-looking white polo shirt' (*ibid*.: 8) with her glass of cherry coke, before corralling her friends and storming off. These two initially antagonistic characters, as might be predicted in the context of romance, ultimately end up romantically linked. In common with Burgess's heroine Jackie, Bianca, despite her misgivings, finds herself irresistibly attracted by the hero's 'physical' appeal. When she is forced to collaborate with Wesley on an English assignment for school, she is pressured to visit Wesley's home.

In contrast to Burgess's text, however, this encounter ends up with the young antagonists participating in 'Pure, unadulterated' (*ibid*.: 84), blissful sex which significantly is initiated and led by Bianca herself:

> Before he could say my name, I closed the space between us. Quickly my lips moved against his. The mental and emotional emptiness took over instantly, but physically, I was more alert than ever...Without speaking, without hesitating, I pulled my T-shirt over my head and threw it onto Wesley's bedroom floor. He didn't have a chance to say anything before I put my hands on his shoulders and shoved him onto his back. A second later, I was straddling him and we were kissing again...I didn't care. I didn't feel self conscious or shy...I unbuttoned his shirt' (*ibid*.: 82-83).

In a carnivalized reversal of romantic hierarchies, the un-practised Bianca confounds expectations by assuming a confident, assertive and predatory sexual role, whilst serial seducer Wesley becomes the passive recipient. Indeed, Kepplinger's heroine shows little interest in conventional romance and, to her own surprise, continues to seek out further opportunities to satisfy her physical/sexual desire. When she next sees Wesley in the school canteen, for instance, she drags the reluctant womanizer away from a group of grief stricken 'skinny' girls that he is charming: '"Just shut up and come with me." I led him down the hall past the English classrooms' (*ibid*.: 103). Once alone, she instigates a comically imagined, sexual liaison amidst the buckets and brooms of the 'janitor's closet', before arranging their next tryst: 'I squirmed out of his arms and moved towards the door, nearly tripping over what felt like a bucket..."Tonight, I'll be at your house around seven."...before he could answer, I slipped out of the closet and hurried down the hall, hoping it didn't look like a walk of shame' (*ibid*.: 103-104). These 'exhilarating' and 'liberating' sexual encounters provide Bianca with a blissful physical distraction from the troubles she is experiencing in her home life: 'I felt dirty. I felt like I'd done something wrong and shameful, but at the same time, I felt good. Alive. Free. Wild. My mind was totally cleared' (*ibid*.: 86). An impressed, and enthusiastically responsive Wesley, although somewhat bemused, is more than happy to oblige.

In a reversal of traditional young adult narratives of romance and development, then, Keplinger suggests that the physical pleasures of adolescent sex take precedence over and precede mutually respectful relationships and 'love'. When Bianca and Wesley tentatively begin to confide in each other, of course, a more conventionally 'appropriate' relationship begins to form. Nevertheless, Bianca's pro-active role, and enjoyment of sex for its own sake, unsettles the conventions of young adult romance tradition and pushes the boundaries of sexual gender alignments in ways that *Doing It* does not. As Lydia Kokkola (2011), Walsh (2004: 149) and others point out, 'strong and proactive' females in Burgess's texts are conventionally represented as dangerous or 'mutants ... monsters'. The predatory female teacher Miss Young, for example, is likened to a 'huge, carnivorous beetle' (Burgess, 2003: 271), whilst the sexually precocious child Zoë/Siobhan is described as a malicious 'beast with a very short attention span and he [Dino] was safe only for as long as he could keep her amused' (*ibid*.: 204). The role of these females, it is implied, is useful in terms of sexual initiation but they are fundamentally undesirable as partners and have no 'long-term' appeal. As Dino contemplates sex with Zoë/Siobhan he is unaware of the irony of his observations:

> ...he wasn't all that familiar with sluts. The girls he hung around with were quite picky. There were some, particularly in the year below him, who let just about anyone feel them up but he doubted if even they'd go to a party and end up shagging someone they'd only known for five minutes just to get a place to sleep. What a slapper! He wondered if it was her fault he hadn't got it up. Maybe he needed a decent girl to turn him on...But it was no good. Dino didn't want to get it up just for decent girls. He wanted to do it with slappers, slags and sluts...The more the merrier. (*ibid*.: 105)

Highly critical of Zoë/Siobhan's sexual promiscuity and 'slutty' behaviour, Dino oblivious to any contradiction, contemplates his own with great relish and delight. And whilst the narrator tells us 'None of the abusive thoughts about the girl felt true inside him' (*ibid*.: 105), subsequent events confirm that, in fact, she is not fundamentally decent or a particularly 'safe' and likeable girl. On the contrary, she is an untrustworthy thief and liar – who in revenge for his betrayal sets-up Dino on a shop-lifting charge. The true object of Dino's desire, Jackie, on the other hand, is 'sensible' and 'nice' (*ibid*.: 159). She tells us: 'I would never shag

someone just for sex and betray my boyfriend. Other girls might do that but not me, oh no – I have to have a decent relationship with them before you get down to that sort of thing. I have to like them and respect them and they have to respect me – even if it's a total arse like Dino!' (*ibid*.: 54). Despite her sexual longing, she thus repeatedly resists full sex 'sleeping with someone, she explained, was a very special thing...she fancied him something chronic...but something was holding her back' (*ibid*.: 167). When Dino, ultimately decides to reject her for her confusing indecision and hesitation, it is in favour of the equally beautiful and 'sensible' Marianne: 'she's pretty straightforward, which is probably more like what I need right now' (*ibid*.: 324).

In contrast to Keplinger's text, then, 'nice' girls it is implied do not participate in relationships for sexual satisfaction alone. In *Doing It* young female sexuality is subversively acknowledged but must be responsibly kept in check; young boys, uncontrolled predatory heterosexuality, on the other hand, is taken as read. In his exploration of the debate surrounding the publication of *Doing It*, David Mellor observes of the book and its defenders:

> ...the boys' behaviour was accepted as normal for young people of their age, and there were no challenges to the hegemonic masculinity expressed in the text and in much of the debate surrounding its publication and its suitable or correct readership. The overarching reason for their lack of criticism was that the book was viewed as a kind of 'social realist' text which tackled life 'as it is' (and the inference is, as it ought to be) (2012*:* 444).

So, despite the author's stated intention to usurp conservative understandings - 'Where were the books about lust and irresponsibility for young women?//Young people especially girls suffer endless pressure to be responsible' (Burgess in Gibbons, 2003) - recognition of youthful sexuality in *Doing It* ultimately reinforces dominant narratives of gendered childhood. Referencing Valerie Walkerdine (1997), Mellor notes that these cultural assumptions assert the sexual behaviour of boys as an 'unstoppable' and 'natural' compulsion which 'they cannot help' (Mellor, 2012: 441), whilst similar behaviour in girls is positioned as improper and/or aberrant. Furthermore, because of 'the dominance of masculinity

within heterosexuality, it has been claimed that heterosexuality is masculinity...[and] central to defining sexuality for both women and men' (*ibid*.). In *Doing It*, for example, the girls are eager to provide sexual delight for their boyfriends, whilst the boys tend to be motivated by an all-consuming desire to achieve sexual satisfaction or 'release' for themselves.

So, although Keplinger's feminist reworking of romance is less self-consciously literal and graphic than the grotesque realism, of *Doing It*, I would suggest her carnivalesque inversions and reversals enact a more effective interrogation of 'naturally' or 'essentially' gendered sexuality for adolescent boys as well as girls. Bianca's own 'unstoppable' sexual compulsion, for instance, when coupled with Wesley's social and familial exclusion and sense of isolation challenge the prioritisation of predatory 'heterosexual masculinity' as the accepted 'norm'. Wesley's wealthy and sophisticated grandmother and good-natured younger sister are troubled and alienated from him by his promiscuous behaviour. And far from giving him status and admiration amongst his peers, as is the case with Dino, Wesley's popularity with the girls leaves him with only 'one *real* friend' at school: 'Harrison is the only guy who will be seen with me, that's because we aren't trying to attract the same audience' (Keplinger, 2012: 118). These revelations when allied to the acknowledgement of alternative male sexualities begin to challenge Bianca's initial observations which assume macho sexual predation as the inevitable or unquestioned 'norm'. Although a peripheral character, for instance, casual references to the attractive and good humoured 'totally gay' (*ibid*.: 3) Harrison Carlyle suggest homosexuality is an unexceptional aspect of their youth culture, an accepted part of teenage life. By the same token, the true object of Bianca's desire Toby, with his 'outdated' haircut, 'pasty ivory skin' (*ibid*.: 24) is clearly able to control his sexual drive. Indeed, to Bianca's consternation, he is frustratingly restrained: 'God knows how long we spent making out on my bed, pieces of clothing being removed at a snail's pace...While part of me appreciated his patience, I couldn't help thinking, *Took you long enough*' (*ibid*.: 275). Far from reinforcing the notions of sexual ineptitude which are conventionally associated with the 'geeky' boy, however, his tardiness in

responding to Bianca's insistent sexual advances, it is implied, is a consequence of an experienced and considerate approach. He has, after all, just emerged from a long-term romantic relationship with another girl. In fact, it soon emerges that Bianca's impatience arises from uncertainties and insecurities in herself:

> I wondered if he was hesitating because of me. Because I was Duff. Because he didn't really find me attractive. Not the way Wesley had. No, that wasn't right. It wasn't that Toby didn't want the big things – he was a teenage boy, after all – but he was...a patient, respectful boy, who didn't want to cross any lines (*ibid*.: 274).

Keplinger's carnivalized discourse, then, challenges gendered romantic hierarchies and limiting definitions of sexual identity in a way Burgess's text does not. Indeed, I shall go on to suggest that Keplinger's youthful address and perspective acknowledge subversive adolescent sexuality in a way that the adult author's boldly *authentic* 'warts and all' (Burgess, 2004: 297) representations actively work to contain.

5.2. Narrative Address: Telling it 'as it is'?

Although Burgess acknowledges that there is 'is an ethical side' to his novels his stated intention has always been to avoid the regulating didacticism commonly associated with young adult texts: a 'novel isn't an educational tract...it isn't about rules and regulations, or what age you do this and that or how often' (Burgess, 2004: 298). Whilst this leads to a less obviously censorious presence in *Doing It*, the voice and perspective of the adult, I would argue, nevertheless prevails, and is perhaps most clearly evident in the vernacular the author employs: As Walsh (2004: 148) points out, for instance, Burgess: 'Probably wisely...does not attempt to employ the register of teen speak'. In his 'New Casebooks' essay '"One of the Boys"? Writing Sex for Teenagers', Chris Richards makes a similar point: 'Rather than attempting to reflect the actual speech of any particular group of young people, *Doing It* follows a generic representation of young people's sexual language familiar from [current] film and television' (2013: 29-30). The same observation might be made of the vocabulary used in Keplinger's text. However, whilst hers has a consistent, recognisable contemporaneity: 'she has a knack for

writing in an authentic teen voice' (Borné 2010), Burgess's writing reflects more variable language use. Walsh (2004: 148), for instance, refers to the 'jarring' use of the 'outmoded' term 'wally' (Burgess, 2003: 100). I would argue, that this and other words such as 'disco' (*ibid*.: 10), 'looker' (*ibid*.: 105), 'sizzler' (*ibid*.: 123), 'bazookas' (*ibid*.: 149), 'crud' (*ibid*.: 224) and so on, suggest a vernacular more readily identified with the era of the middle-aged author's own youth. Whilst effective in conveying the anarchic irreverence of adolescent discourse in general terms, the use of somewhat outdated words and phrases, at times, sits uncomfortably within the 'realistic' twenty-first century setting he attempts to convey. Not least, they signal an adult presence in the text. As one teenage reviewer observes: 'the writer must be really old, no one talks like that anymore, I mean discos?' (in Neumark, 2003: 26).

Alongside this linguistic discontinuity, a less obviously signed adult presence might be said to reside in the author's literal, physical descriptions of teenage sex which, I would suggest, in their graphic detail and emphasis ironically carry with them a categorically conventional drive to instruct. Jonathan's recollection of his first fumbling sexual encounter, for instance, like many descriptions of sex and sexuality in *Doing It*, has a studied attention to detail which seems intended to guide and inform. Implying a less knowing audience, Jonathan reassures his readers/listeners: 'Those patches of ignorance? You get them all the time. You just have to hang on and see what happens next. And then the answer comes, it's so simple you can't believe you missed it' (Burgess, 2003: 218), before expanding on his theme: 'I thought it was at the front...When blokes shag a girl, their bums go up and down, not to and fro...But it explained a lot. Like, for instance, why my willy stuck up in the air. Think about it; if fannies really were on the front, your knob ought to stick straight out' (*ibid*.: 219). These oft-repeated scenarios although expressing a comically subversive acknowledgement of sexuality, in their detail and general focus: they worry 'about their sexual performance (or lack of it)' (Tucker, 2003a), inevitably position the young protagonist, and indeed the implied young adult reader, as being 'childishly' naïve with an unsophisticated knowledge of the human body and the sex act itself. As

Waller notes, Burgess's narrative indicates the 'underlying innocence of all the boys' sexual adventures...despite the explicitness of the narrative content' (2013: 9). Indeed, Jonathan tells us: 'It's scary. Sex is well...it's so rude isn't it?' (Burgess, 2004: 145). This perspective might be seen as somewhat ironic given the author's above noted stress on the more sexually precocious and 'savvy' contemporary youth. As one young reader amused by media criticism of *Doing It* as pornography remarks: 'You don't read books for porn. You buy magazines or go on the net' (in Neumark, 2003: 26).

So, whilst claiming to represent authentic contemporary account, the novel's sometimes incongruous vocabulary use and assumptions of sexual naïvety might, in fact, be seen to resonate more closely with the less sexually informed era of the middle-aged author's own teenage years: 'I went around all my friends and acquaintances and asked everyone I knew for their early knobby stories...Out of these, I assembled the events in *Doing It* around three lads I knew when I was younger' (Burgess, 2004: 296). Richards, too, picks up on this point when discussing Fine's response to Burgess's novel:

> Perhaps the distance between themselves and their "constituencies" that neither Burgess nor Fine acknowledge is evident in their apparently similar designation of sex as "dirty"...Drawing on this discourse of sex may well imply...self-location for both the novelist and the reviewer as troubled adults still struggling to come to terms with the embodied realities of sexual life (2012: 31-32).

Given Keplinger's own youth, it may be that the more sophisticated and sexually aware young adults in her romance narrative suggest a more plausible account. Keplinger's young male/female protagonists, for instance, although sometimes naïve and humorously awkward in their approach to sex, are never assumed to be comically unknowing or farcically inept. Indeed, the young author takes 'as read' a level of sexual knowledge and 'know how' in her teenage characters and, by implication, the text's young adult readers too. That is, sex and sexual relations although central and graphically imagined are significantly less anatomical and have an altogether less self-consciously instructive quality and tone:

> ...his lips moved lower and lower, and I was surprised by how much I was anticipating their final destination...I'd heard Vikki and even Casey talk about their boyfriends going down on them and how good it felt....It was kind of weird at first, but then it wasn't any more. It felt ...strange – but in a good way. Dirty, wrong, *amazing*. My fingers curled in the sheets, gripping the cloth tightly, and my knees shook. I was feeling things I'd never felt before...I gasped with pleasure and surprise (Keplinger, 2012: 205-206).

Drawing from the clichés of adult romance, this unconventionally explicit adolescent female perspective, I would argue, allows a far more radical and unselfconscious celebration of pleasurable teenage sex, than the anxious and mechanical physical encounters offered by Burgess's young 'male' view. As Tucker points out in his review, in *Doing It* 'sex without feeling, or of some sense of responsibility [remains]...poor stuff' (2003a). The importance of emotional engagement is certainly emphasized in *The Duff*, but not before acknowledging the possibility of exhilarating, uncommitted adolescent sex. In this context, it conveys a sense of natural jouissance, which *Doing It's* comic physicality repeatedly denies. Richards (2013), Victoria Neumark (2003) and others also pick up on the lack of sexual joy in Burgess's young adult fiction: 'despite the wealth of slang terms and physical dimensions' sex scenes in *Doing It* lack the 'essential ingredients (desire and pleasure)' (Neumark, 2003: 26). The male teenagers Neumark questions, in fact, deride it for these limitations: sex seems 'pretty rubbish', as well as the author's essentialist approach 'it makes boys out to be dickheads, literally, their heads are in their dicks'. In effect, the author's subversive 'everyboy' perspective 'the idea was simply to show ordinary lads in all their warty glory, wanting as much sex as they could get' (Burgess, 2004: 297), with its insistent focus on their *physical* wants and needs, in the end, re-produces restricted and restricting stereotypes. I would argue, then, that despite claims to the contrary, *Doing It* ultimately works to 'fix' the child and keep it in place (Rose, 1992: 4). Indeed, by referencing Jacqueline Rose's (1984/1992) double address, I shall suggest that ambivalences in the text's narrative structure actively draw in and contain rather than empower or give voice to contemporary boyhood or youth: 'I think, to be authentic and get boys reading it, it has to be quite filthy' (Burgess in Robinson, 2001).

5.3. Who is speaking and to whom?

Formed largely through the characters' first-person accounts, Walsh argues that the employment of multiple address in *Doing It* leaves 'the reader free to make up their own minds about which perspective(s) to accept' (2004: 147). I would argue, however, that the 'intermittent passages [and] chapters' of omniscient narration, in fact, effectively counter this potential in the novel. Rather than freeing his readers 'to make up their own minds' (*ibid*.), this more knowing presence repeatedly explains and interprets the various characters' thoughts and feelings on the their behalf. We are told, for instance, that despite her efforts, Siobhan's/Zoe's mother had never been able to 'work out her strange elfin daughter. She'd tried, you had to give her that. No, it was quite clear, it was Zoe who was the problem and no one else' (Burgess, 2003: 127). Similarly, the confused Dino:

> ...was so relieved at having successfully lost his virginity that he had no idea how unhappy this new situation made him for all sorts of reasons...Jackie had rejected him yet again, which had hurt very much indeed...He was in love with her and didn't even know it (Burgess, 2003: 129-30).

Perhaps more unsettling, however, is the intrusive access this implied adult presence has to the intimate aspects of each of the young characters' lives and thoughts:

> Then for some reason, Dino looked at the bed...They both looked at each other. 'I better go,' said the girl...She was just standing there all bare with her arms wrapped round herself, holding tight to her fag...Actually, she looked a bit of a tart. Make-up smudged all over the place, grubby legs...Dino knew, suddenly, without knowing why, that he could do anything he liked to this girl and she'd let him...He peeled her knickers off and she lifted her legs to help him. And then...and then...Dino began to lose it (*ibid*.: 98-102).

Indeed, as the narrator shifts between third-person reportage and first-person dialogue, an uncomfortable blurring begins to occur. The frequency of such shifts in narration, when allied to the didactic quality noted in the characters' *own*

accounts of sex and sexual experience - 'And I made the room a bit dim...I was worried that once I took my clothes off, he'd see all my lumps and bumps and that'd put him off...But I didn't want to make it too dim, you know why, because a lot of people, a lot of boys, they like to see what they're getting' (*ibid*.: 311) - makes it difficult to distinguish exactly whose voice and perspective is actually conveyed and, at times, exactly *who* is being addressed or *reassured*: 'I'd like to put it on record that a great deal of the porn I look at is only looked at for the sake of curiosity...It just amazes me that it's out there and can be seen by perverts like me while they're looking for wholesome babes to drool over' (*ibid*.: 216). As in Rose's account this 'confusion of tongues', at times, fails to 'properly distinguish the narrating adult from the child' (1992: 68). The controlling adult presence, in effect, replays and secures reassuring and nostalgic *adult* imaginings of youth and past under the guise of an authentic contemporary teenage culture and voice, or as Richards (2013: 37) puts it 'a comic re-staging of disparate narratives of sexual misadventure from a fraction of Burgess's own generation'. In this account unruly adolescence and youthful sexuality is laughingly reduced to a 'separate' and passing phase: 'Comically toe-curling scenes...will make...adult readers glad to be grown-up' (Spring, 2003), or as Rose might put it: 'their difference is a sign of how we've progressed' (1992: 13). I would argue, then, that *Doing It*, in the end, is neither a fundamentally radical nor authentically interrogative text. On the contrary, as Nicholas Tucker (2003a), Richards (2013), Waller (2013) and others note, it has 'a relatively conservative ideology that would most likely find relatively few opponents amongst modern parents, educators and commentators' (Waller, 2013: 10).

The open single address, in Keplinger's novel as indicated suggests something more of a challenge to conservative ideology, and, unlike Burgess's narrative works to empower protagonists and teenage readers alike. To begin with the young narrator's clearly signed unreliability - she frequently misreads characters and situations – allied to her overt cynicism and feminist outlook make clear that this is neither an unbiased or definitive 'authoritative' account. On the contrary, repeated intertextual references not only remind the reader that this is a reworked

'romance', but point to the socio-political and literary sources from which the heroine Bianca shapes her understandings of sexual relationships and sexual identity:

> I figured out the benefit...while we were watching Atonement in Jessica's bedroom. In the movie, poor Keira Knightly has to go through all this dam tragedy with James McAvoy, but if she'd been unattractive, he never would have looked at her...After all, everybody knows the "it's better to have loved and lost ..." spiel is a load of crap.//The theory applies to a lot of movies, too. Think about it. If Kate Winslet had been the Duff, Leonardo DiCaprio wouldn't have been after her in Titanic, and that could have saved a lot of tears...I watched my friends go through boy drama all the time. Usually, the relationships ended with them crying...or screaming...So really watching Atonement with my friends made me realize how thankful I should have been to be the Duff (Keplinger, 2012: 18).

Feeling resentful and excluded from traditional young love narratives, the 'snarky' and amusingly self-aware Bianca, simply deconstructs and reforms romance stories in order to write herself in. She begins by justifying her passionate sexual liaisons with Wesley by aligning herself to Nathanial Hawthorne's (1850) tragic fictional heroine Hester Prynne. When she ends this 'inappropriate' relationship she self-consciously resorts to the clichés of popular romance: '"Because this isn't working for me anymore," I said, sticking with the traditional lines I'd heard in movies. They were classics for a reason, after all' (*ibid*.: 225). Torn between her attraction to respectable 'dream man' Toby and her ongoing desire for Wesley, Bianca later imagines herself as the 'spoiled and selfish' Cathy Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Humorously usurping Emily Bronte's protagonists Bianca muses: '*My love for Toby is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees – my love for Wesley resembles the eternal rocks beneath*' (*ibid*.: 307). In contrast to these tragic literary heroines, however, Bianca determines to construct a more positive denouement for herself. Returning to Wesley, she acknowledges his love and affection before insisting they move on with a more conventional romance, albeit one humorously undermined by her insistently pragmatic approach: 'I swatted his hand away. "First of all," I began, "I don't *love* you...romantic love

takes years upon years to develop...But I will admit, I've thought a lot about you lately and I definitely have feelings for you...And maybe it's possible- in the future – that I could love you' (*ibid*.: 338). This is, of course, by no means guaranteed given Bianca's stated intention 'to get out of Hamilton as soon as possible' (*ibid*.: 19) in order to pursue her ambition to become a reporter for the *New York Times* (*ibid*.: 257).

Keplinger's narrator thus consciously rewrites herself as a new style young heroine of popular romance. It would be disingenuous, however, to suggest, that the novel's general conformity and overall moral frame provides a fundamentally radical account, 'inappropriate' sexuality, in the end, is reassuringly reined in, but in a significant departure from Burgess's text this is achieved without denying the potential pleasures of uncommitted adolescent sex. Keplinger's, self-aware, self-determining young narrator, unlike Burgess's controversially blustering but endearingly naïve and childlike characters, is trusted to articulate her own knowing sexuality in her own voice; to self-consciously plot out her own narrative path. And *The Duff's* implied young adult readers are encouraged to actively interpret and question, rather than accept as authentic, definitive sexual stereotypes.

5.4. Crossing the Divide

Despite its adolescent protagonist, *The Duff*, holds out the same cross-audience potential that Burgess's double address actively seeks to achieve. That is, what Mellor (2012), Helen Petersen and others identify as the adult desire to revisit first-sex or first love. In her analysis of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005-2008) series, for instance, Petersen notes this as one of the pleasures adult readers confessed to deriving from reading the texts: that 'teenage feeling...the stomach punch of first love, a keen sense of sexual desire' (2012: 60). And, as Mellor observes, *Doing It's* publishers have inevitably been keen to exploit this call to the past: the 'paperback edition of the book...shows the possibly pre- or post-coital scene of a bed and the legs of a young girl who is pulling on her underwear,

accompanied by the strap-line “do you remember the first time?”//... in the main part at least, an economic decision aimed at securing a lucrative crossover readership’ (2012: 448). However, whilst Burgess speaks to adult readers surreptitiously in the type of covert address Astrid Lindgren (1978) describes as ‘winking at the adult’ (in Shavit, 1986: 41) over the head of the young, Keplinger’s young characters and implied readers are ‘in on the joke’. In the true spirit of Bakhtin’s carnival, they participate and celebrate on equal terms ‘carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 11) and for this reason perhaps provide more comfortable reading for adults than Burgess’s somewhat ambivalent and voyeuristic narrative stance, a concern Justine Picardie notes in her review of his work:

> Burgess’s age, or the unavoidable fact of his authorial presence as an adult, might alienate some readers...Certainly, writers such as Anthony Horowitz and Philip Pullman feel that teenagers’ sex lives are their own business; that for an adult author to act as commentator is akin to a peeping Tom (2003).

Indeed, this view is reinforced by Keplinger’s young narrator when she describes the added frisson of *unsanctioned* teenage sex: ‘“We spent most of our time sneaking around so that our parents...wouldn’t find out about us. I actually found that part, the secrecy, fun and sexy. It was like forbidden romance – like Romeo and Juliet’ (Keplinger, 2012: 85).

Nostalgic appeal aside, the limited content and scope of these realist ‘teen’ novels inevitably compromises their potential for the more sophisticated and challenging cross audience appeal offered by the fantasy/sub-fantasy genres. In his observations of Burgess’s work, Simon Gilson (2003) picks up on this point. He argues that the author’s novels ‘without the marketable “naughtiness”’, would struggle to stand alone in the adult market, because in contrast to well written young adult fantasy stories which ‘consider both real and fantastic situations with the mature subtlety of adult fiction’, Burgess’s limited gritty realism is unable to ‘reflect life and its many layers’. Indeed, the opinion amongst critics and commentators generally has been that the modern cross-audience phenomena ‘would be limited to the genre of children’s fantasy fiction’ (Falconer, 2009: 95).

As Walsh (2007), Rachel Falconer (2009), Sandra Beckett (2009), Stefania Ciocia (2009) and others demonstrate, however, the popularity of Mark Haddon's 'literary' realist novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) amongst readers of all ages challenges this view: 'virtually single-handedly, "*Curious Incident* [has] greatly increased the number of adults reading children's realist fiction' (Ciocia, 2009: 322). Accurately sensing the book's commercial possibilities publishers, against the author's own inclination, produced two imprints making it the first British novel to be marketed simultaneously as adults' and children's fiction. Never intended for a young audience by the writer himself, Haddon suggests that adults and children are likely to read and interpret his novel in specific and different ways. As Walsh (2007: 110) notes, for him 'the child or young adult reader is more likely to read it as a straightforward "issues" novel about a disability', whilst his 'ideal' adult reader will recognise and respond to it as 'a book about books, about what you can do with words and what it means to communicate with someone in a book' (Haddon in Walsh, 2007: 110). In her analysis of Haddon's text, Walsh argues that the author's assumptions about his young readers, at best, are debateable given the 'highly metafictive' and intertextual nature of books, films and games whose 'primary audience comprises children and young adults' (2007: 110). With reference to Bakhtin's carnivalesque, I intend to argue that aside from the author's questionable division of adult/child reader categories, his observations underestimate the opportunities and potential offered by his novel's unusual protagonist and innovative narrative structure and style.

5.5. On the Outside Looking In: An Alternative View

Haddon's confused and alienated narrator, Christopher Boone is fifteen-years-old and living at home with his father, in the wake of his parents' marital breakdown. Whilst these elements are familiar to the young adult novel, I shall argue that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* ultimately cannot be described as the typical 'rites of passage' novel Ruth Gilbert (2005) identifies in her essay on Haddon's work. That is, one in which the 'adolescent hero (usually a boy)

embark[s] upon a symbolic journey towards adulthood' (Gilbert, 2005: 242). On the contrary, Christopher's, implied form of Autism from the start, results in a far from typical teenage experience, persona, and voice: 'Those with Asperger's often communicate differently than do others, one reason being that they "read" differently than most' (Carter, 2007: 8). Christopher, for example, is unable to discern other people's thoughts and emotions or correctly read 'social cues especially those that are non-verbal' (Kirby in Carter, 2007: 8). He dislikes crowds, fears any form of physical contact and is insistently literal in his interpretation of events. These 'limitations' imbue him with an endearing *childlike* vulnerability and naïvety which has the potential to empower and entertain more 'knowing' or socially/emotionally literate readers across the age range who can fill in the gaps of knowledge/perception and make the links that Christopher fails to see. The novel opens with his gruesome discovery of a neighbour's dog 'Wellington', fatally impaled by a garden fork: 'I pulled the fork out of the dog and lifted him into my arms and hugged him. He was leaking blood from the fork holes.//I like dogs you know what a dog is thinking' (Haddon, 2003: 4). When the neighbour herself emerges and wrongly suspects Christopher of committing the offence, he cowers in fear like a young child:

> She was shouting, 'What in fuck's name have you done to my dog?'...
> I put the dog down on the lawn and moved back 2 metres...//I put my hands over my ears and closed my eyes and rolled forward till I was hunched up with my forehead pressed onto the grass' (Haddon, 2003: 4).

This vulnerability and social naïvety, at the same time, however, lead to a disconcerting unpredictability and mindset which sees Christopher challenge authority in a number of unconventional and unexpected ways. In a series of sometimes poignant and often amusing encounters, he repeatedly exasperates, confuses and/or undermines those in positions of power and/or those responsible for his care.

When a police officer arrives to investigate the death of 'Mrs Shears'' dog, for instance, Christopher unexpectedly lashes out: 'The policeman took hold of my arm and lifted me onto my feet. I didn't like him touching me like this. I hit him'

(*ibid*.: 8-9), and when he is subsequently cautioned for this offence, Christopher, against his own interests, insists on challenging what the inspector says:

> 'Right I am going to give you a caution.'
> I asked, 'Is that going to be on a piece of paper like a certificate I can keep?'
> He replied, 'No a caution means that we are going to keep a record of what you did, that you hit a policeman but that was an accident and that you didn't mean to hurt the policeman'.
> I said 'But it wasn't an accident.'
>
> And father said, 'Christopher, please.'
> The policeman closed his mouth and breathed out loudly through his nose...(*ibid*.: 23).

Similarly, when Christopher determines to investigate who killed Wellington and record this experience in his favourite 'mystery' novel form he does so against his father's forcefully expressed wish. His inability to intuit other people's thoughts and emotions, inevitably, makes his rebellious investigation a sometimes comic and challenging task. In her journal article 'Postmodern Investigations: The Case of Christopher Boone in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*' Ciocia points out that: 'Nowhere is this more evident than when Christopher imagines a perfectly logical "Chain of Reasoning" which leads him to conclude that Mr Shears is his "Prime Suspect"', something even the most unsuspicious readers, 'but tellingly, not Christopher himself' (2009: 329), are likely to suspect is an erroneous conclusion. Nevertheless, his obsessive persistence, in the face of his father's increasing fury and disapproval - 'What...did I say, Christopher?...Not to go around sticking your fucking nose into other people's business' (Haddon, 2003: 102-103) - *does* ultimately lead him to discover who the real culprit is. After Christopher finds a stash of hidden letters written to him by his mother, his father is forced to admit the truth. In a remorseful and emotional confession he first reveals that he had lied about his wife's death after she left him to run off with Mr Shears; he then owns up to killing Wellington, after having rowed furiously with his ex-lover Mrs Shears. In the context of Bakhtin's carnival, then, the language of the 'marketplace', emphasis on adult sexual transgression and the physically grotesque: '[Wellington] was leaking blood from the fork holes' (*ibid*.: 4), 'degrades' those in authority and, in this case, exposes them as vulnerable,

weak and flawed. As Stephens notes the carnivalesque interrogative mode in children's literature recognises 'that adult authority *is* often arbitrary, and that it is often merely a veneer covering radical incompetence' (1992: 156). In Haddon's text this recognition triggers further resistance to adult jurisdiction when Christopher, feeling betrayed and physically threatened, runs away from home.

The precipitate and distressing solution to his 'mystery' thus triggers a 'coming of age' narrative in which Christopher who has never been further than the local shops on his own, embarks on a terrifying journey to London in search of his mother. On the way he foils a police officer's attempts to apprehend him on the train, by poignantly yet comically seeking refuge in the carriage's luggage rack. More unsettlingly, the above indicated tendency to lash out in times of extreme anxiety - 'If a strange man touched me I would hit him, and I can hit people very hard. For example, when I punched Sarah because she had pulled my hair I knocked her unconscious and she had concussion' (Haddon, 2003: 45) - sees Christopher resisting authoritative intervention by threatening physical assault. When a stranger approaches him at Paddington Station to offer help, 'You look lost', the panic-stricken teenager takes out his Swiss Army Knife. 'And...[the stranger] said, "Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa," and held up both his hands with his fingers stretched in a fan...And then he walked away backwards' (*ibid*.: 210). A concerned female passenger, on the underground, is similarly warned off: 'I've got a Swiss Army Knife and it has a saw blade and it could cut someone's fingers off' (*ibid*.: 226).

In contrast to the conventions of young adult development narratives, then, Christopher reaches his intended destination without and/or despite adult intervention, guidance or help. This is a theme which continues when his mother resists his plea to return home: 'I have to sit my Maths A Level...I'm taking it on Wednesday and Thursday and Friday next week...And I'm going to get an A grade. And that's why I have to go back. Except I don't want to see Father. So I have to go to Swindon with you' (*ibid*.: 246-247). His unwavering persistence, in the face of her repeated refusals and subsequent deferral of the exam, helps him to

finally achieve his goal: 'I asked Siobhan if I could still do my A Level...And Siobhan said "You don't have to do it"...And I said, "I want to do it"' (*ibid*.: 256-257). Christopher's cognitive differences, then, set an unconventional challenge to adult authority which foregrounds errors of judgement and misunderstandings occurring on *both sides*. In the tradition of carnival, authority becomes ironically vulnerable and, like him, susceptible to ridicule, mockery and abuse. Whilst this enacted resistance will inevitably resonate with young readers, Christopher is not easily categorised within the traditional narratives of age, as his naïve and childlike behaviour can represent a challenge - and/or even a threat. Neither is, his 'transition' an entirely familiar one. As Walsh points out the story's positive ending 'offers schema refreshment for the adult reader, since even qualified happy endings tend to be an anathema in contemporary literary fiction for adults' (2007: 116). At the same time Christopher's empowerment - 'I am going to go to university in another town...And then I will get a first class honours degree and I will become a scientist.// I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything' (Haddon, 2003: 267-268) - is compromised in the context of children's and young adults' literature because Christopher, in the end 'has changed very little as a result of his experiences' (Walsh, 2007: 116). That is, he doesn't transition to coherent or 'unified' adulthood in the recognised sense.

This ambivalence is echoed in Christopher's telling and presentation of his perspective and the events that occur in his life. As noted above, the comic pedantry and insistent literalism of Christopher's account engenders laughter which is heightened by the fact that Christopher himself is, not 'in on the joke' (Greenwell, 2004: 280). He tells us, for instance, that he is unable to read facial expressions and recounts how he had attempted to resolve the problem by carrying in his pocket a piece of paper his teacher Siobhan had produced for him. On it were drawings depicting various expressions accompanied by a description of what they denote. Christopher, tells us: 'I took it out when I didn't understand what someone was saying. But it was very difficult to decide which of the diagrams was most like the face they were making...When I told Siobhan that I was doing this...she laughed. So I tore the original piece of paper up and threw it

away' (Haddon, 2003: 3). His cognitive limitations, then, generate humour as we fill in the gaps on the young narrator's behalf. However, as Bill Greenwell points out in 'The Curious Incidence of Novels About Asperger's Syndrome', this position is countered by Christopher's 'bald logic' (2004: 281) which has the potential to encourage the reverse: 'I do not like proper novels. In proper novels people say things like, "I cannot contract into the firm fist which those clench who do not depend on stimulus". What does that mean? I do not know. Nor does Father...Siobhan or Mr Jeavons' (Haddon, 2003: 5). Similar potential resides in high level intellect Christopher displays. His cogent explanation of 'The Monty Hall Problem', for instance, is described by Greenwell as 'a...stroke of genius on Haddon's part... [as] he puts innumerable readers (this one included) into mental difficulty. Christopher thinks the statistics are simple; we don't. We are, therefore, forced to reverse our roles' (2004: 281). Greenwell's observations are significant, then, as they indicate that Christopher's logic and knowledge may challenge and undermine experienced as well as inexperienced readers of any age. In effect, like carnival's clown, he offers active and complex subject positions for readers who at the same time as being empowered by his cognitive limitations, are forced by his different abilities and perceptions to confront gaps in their own understandings too.

However, Greenwell's assertion that Christopher's digressions along with the use of pictures, equations...the inclusion of 'letters, typography' and so on, are evidence of writing 'limitations' which 'keep readers happily bamboozled' (2004: 281) is a more questionable one. I would argue, for instance, that the text book diagrams, tables and so on, that Christopher uses in some of his explanations, may be said to produce the opposite effect and, in fact, enact a carnivalesque inversion of the conventional adult/teacher and child/student roles. In his review of Haddon's novel, for example, Helmer Aslaksen remarks:

> Christopher of course includes a clear explanation of the Sieve of Eratosthenes. In addition there are nice discussions of the Monty Hall problem, the logistic equation, Conway's soldiers, chaos theory, and several other mathematics, logic and physics topics. They are all explained in a clear and understandable way.//I am passionately involved in mathematical outreach, and I would say Christopher is a natural at it...Are

> you concerned about how to pick the right topics at the right level and present them in a clear and understandable way? Then *The Curious Incident* is a good book for you. Just do it the way Christopher does (2006: 345).

In 'ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comic Studies', James Bucky Carter (2007) expands on this inclusive approach. Drawing on the theories of W.J.T. Mitchell (1986), he argues that Christopher's self-explicatory approach 'the book is highly metacognitive, always aware of its own textuality...Christopher often explains why he is making textual decisions' (Carter, 2007: 9) and use of image and text far from representing 'simple entertainments' or 'bamboozling' (Greenwell, 2004: 281) the reader, provide salient insights into the narrator's mindset and aid understanding of the often challenging and complex perceptions, feelings and concepts he conveys. In contrast to Greenwell (2004), Gilbert (2005), Falconer (2009) and others, he views Christopher as an enabled storyteller, whose idiosyncratic presentation reflects consciously chosen 'preferences' rather than limitations or 'disability' *per se*.

For instance, despite his stated dislike of novels, he chooses to frame his narrative as a 'murder mystery' because it reflects his enjoyment of puzzles and desire for order and control: 'It is a puzzle. If it is a good puzzle you can sometimes work out the answer before the end of the book' (Haddon, 2003: 5). Not least, it allows the socially/culturally excluded Christopher, 'sometimes children from the school down the road see us in the street...and they shout "Special Needs! Special Needs!"' to 'prove that [he is] not stupid' (*ibid.*: 56). In this case, he does so by identifying with Sherlock Holmes, the iconic and famously logical protagonist of his favourite novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

> He is very intelligent and he solves the mystery//The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.//But he notices them, like I do. Also it says in the book//Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will.//And this is like me, too. (Haddon, 2003: 92).

The elevated and iconic status of Christopher's chosen role model, will resonate with readers who regardless of age and culture, are unlikely to be indifferent to this self-consciously referenced source. And as Walsh notes, even if they are, it is not 'really a problem in *The Curious Incident*, since Christopher obligingly fills in the intertextual gap for any reader who is unfamiliar with the main intertext, Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, by devoting an entire chapter to a detailed summary of the plot' (2007: 112).

Similarly self-conscious and paradoxical reasoning is used by Christopher to justify his use of literary devices and unconventional privileging of imagery as text. In spite of his acknowledged disdain for misleading metaphor, for example - 'I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards' (Haddon, 2003: 20) - he is comfortable using figurative language and graphics in his narrative. This, he tells us, is because a simile is not 'a lie, unless it is a bad simile' (Haddon, 2003: 22). Thus, he likens his grandmother's dementia to 'pictures in her head...all confused, like someone has muddled the film up' (*ibid*.: 99), whilst his own memory is compared to 'like a DVD because I don't have to Rewind through everything in between to get to the memory of something a long time ago' (*ibid*.: 96). As Walsh notes 'the similes he uses to describe the workings of his own mind, drawing upon a variety of sources...give a whole new meaning to the concept of cognitive metaphor and he even invents a few of his own' (2007: 112), such as 'Red is good, yellow is bad' (Haddon, 2003: 3). In the case of the latter, he explains that whilst uncharacteristically irrational, 'it is sort of being silly' (*ibid*.: 106), his desire for order and certainty justifies his resort to metaphor: 'It is like being in a restaurant...sometimes you look at the menu and you...[are uncertain] what...to have...so you have favourite foods and you choose these, and you have foods you don't like and you don't choose these, and then it is simple' (*ibid*.: 107). Of particular significance for Carter, however, are the graphical similes he identifies in Haddon's text, which given the narrator's demonstrated ability to use the 'more visually accurate' (Carter, 2007: 17) word images, may be identified as a preferred form of representation when Christopher feels they can better represent his perceived reality or truth. Used against his teacher Siobhan's editorial advice -

‘she said the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head’ (Haddon, 2003: 85) - the inclusion of picture similes, are viewed by Carter as a conscious artistic choice:

> ...in any instance where a graphic is preceded by ‘like this’ it may be that we are not looking at a mere illustration but an ‘imagetexted’ simile...Many...[pictographic] examples are...preceded by ‘like this’ but are clearly images that Christopher doesn’t have words to adequately represent. And why should he? We can read the shapes and forms just fine, better, more accurately, even, than if we could read only words...Christopher has in these instances, solved ‘the problem of ekphrasis’ in his narrative, a pointed example of how he is enabled (Carter, 2007: 17-19).

As well as being used for illustrative purposes, then, to enhance understanding of his scientific or mathematical explanations and so on, Christopher may be said to employ text and imagery in order to *visually* recreate what he sees, whether it is the patterns on the walls and seats of the tube train (Haddon, 2003: 227), or in Carter’s (2007: 18) examples the alien robot (Haddon, 2003: 95), the cloud (*ibid.*: 86) and cow’s pelt (*ibid.*: 176) and so on. At other times, text and image combine to convey what Christopher actually feels and thinks. When frozen by fear and anxiety at Paddington Station (*ibid.*: 208-209), for instance, Christopher’s graphical/textual representation ably communicates the information/sensory overload he experiences and its effect: ‘The image itself must tell us what Christopher knows, sees, reads, and thinks’ (Carter, 2007: 21). So, whilst Greenwell (2004: 280) sees the use of figurative imagery in the novel as an authorial compromise to compensate for Christopher’s ponderous speech and dislike of metaphor, Carter positions it as a contextually justified and enabled narratorial style, which subversively privileges graphics as text.

> Christopher is being deliberate in his intentions to convey information to his reader through the use of print and image should in its own way cancel out a reading of his narrative as one imbued with disability. Christopher is not moving his audience towards an autistic, disjointed, or disconcerting mode of reading or asking readers to accept his text as an example of ‘the best he could do”. Rather in his use of imagetext, he hails forth the most fundamental comprehension skills we use to read any myriad texts we encounter in our daily lives (2007: 25).

This will have resonance for people of his own age and younger and is 'not so far removed from the rest of us advanced readers either' (*ibid*.: 12). In effect, Christopher's self-consciously chosen style of presentation offers accessibility to an audience with a diverse range of reading and understanding skills and tastes.

The disruptions and reversals in Haddon's novel then enact a parody of literary and generic conventions which in the tradition of Bakhtin's carnival, privilege the voice of other and give way to the new: 'bring forth something more and better' (Bakhtin, 1984: 21). In this instance, we have an innovative and hybrid novel which 'in conveying a sense of meaning, also conveys how that meaning is produced' (Webster, 1996: 43). That is, Christopher's narrative foregrounds the multiple and sometime contrary discourses, by which he is 'othered', and within which he attempts to make sense of himself. Far from imposing limiting and limited understandings, Christopher's carnivalized narrative has a 'double-voiced' quality which ironically stresses the ambivalent and relative nature of meaning and truth: 'Bakhtin's dialogic undermines any argument for final unquestionable positions, since every space within language is a space for dialogic forces rather than monologic truth' (Allen, 2005: 211).

5.6. An 'Other' Life

Like the 'othered' teenage protagonist in Haddon's novel, the central character of Guène's *Just Like Tomorrow,* is an isolated and unsettled fifteen year old growing up in a single-parent home, in this instance, located on a grim housing project in the Paris suburbs or *banlieues*: 'the sort of place that went up in flames...when widespread rioting rocked France' (Burke, 2006: 1). Although in many respects a typically discontented and rebellious teenage character, like the atypical Christopher, the socially, culturally and economically marginalised Doria offers a far from straightforward or wholly conventional account of teenage experience and cultural life. As Zuzana Krakta notes in her review 'this...book evokes all the important moments in every girl's life...as well as offering a street-wise, on the-

nail commentary-cum-exposé on life for poor immigrant communities in France' (2009) which perhaps explains why the teenager's novel is 'cannily marketed' (Roberts, 2006) at adult as well as the adolescent readers.

Written in the style of a personal journal and littered with the hybrid Arab/French slang of the *banlieues*, the young narrator Doria's humorous and acerbic observations enact a carnivalesque opposition to authority and authoritative discourses from the opening page. Here we learn she has just attended her weekly consultation with the child psychologist, Mrs Burlaud: 'Mrs Burlaud is old, ugly and...smells of Quik Nits shampoo. I'd say she's harmless, but sometimes I worry' (Guène, 2006: 1). Referred for counselling sessions in the wake of her father's abandonment of the family home, Doria wryly observes:

> The teachers, when they weren't on strike I mean, decided I was shut down or depressed...I guess I've been like it this since my dad left. He went far away. Back to Morocco, to marry another woman who's younger and more fertile than my mum...Dad wanted a son. For his pride, his reputation, the family honour and probably tons of other stupid reasons. But he only got one kid, a girl. Me. Let's say I didn't exactly meet customer requirements. Trouble is, it's not like at the supermarket: he couldn't get his money back. So one day, I guess Mr How-Big-Is-My-Beard realised there was no point staying with my mum and cleared off (*ibid*.: 1-2).

Angered by her father's misogyny, the young protagonist is mockingly resistant to and bitingly critical of the Muslim patriarchy by which she, her mother and other females in her community are suppressed. Of the 'imprisoned' teenage girl Samra on the 'eleventh floor of my block' (*ibid*.: 83) she remarks, 'In their family, the men are kings. They've got Samra under close surveillance...Anyone'd think it was bad luck to be a girl, or something'. When Samra finally escapes and runs off to marry a '*toubab*', or white French 'guy', her abusive father is derided as 'a retired torturer now...her old man couldn't take it and fell ill. Word is part of his body is paralysed...[he's] going to paralyse the other half of his body the day he happens to land on the 'Births' column' (*ibid*.: 139-140). Similarly, Aunt Zohra's husband who spends six months each year with a 'second wife back home...Is this turning into a fashion or what?', is ironically mocked by Doria because: he 'knew how to get the balance right. He does it part-time' (*ibid*.: 26). Abandoned 'full-

time' by their own familial patriarch, Doria and her mother are left feeling increasingly alienated by their broken-home status and the humiliating poverty which forces them to rely on welfare support. They are visited by a 'parade' (*ibid.*: 9) of patronising social workers for whom Doria harbours an equally cynical disdain.

Perhaps more damaging for Doria, however, is the cultural divide between teachers and students at her local school where, for example, 'Mrs Jacques...that crazy old bat' shouts at Doria for the mispronunciation of an unfamiliar word: 'It's because of PEOPLE LIKE YOU that our Frrrench herrrritttage is in a coma!'(*ibid.*: 142). And the 'fat...stupid' principal who 'smells of cheap wine' (*ibid.*: 5), upbraids Doria when she hands him a slip of paper exempting her from 'eating in the school canteen' during Ramadan:

> ...[He] asked me if I was taking him for a complete and total idiot because he thought I'd signed that slip instead of my mum. How stupid is that? If I'd wanted to fake a signature, I'd of written her name. Mum had just done a squiggle. She's not used to holding a biro. Bet that didn't occur to Mr Brain-Dead-Head. He's one of those people who thinks illiteracy is like AIDS. It only happens in Africa (*ibid.*).

Doria's subversive language use and irreverently mocking observations, then, express a carnivalesque uncrowning of authority, an empowering comic resistance which simultaneously exposes the socio-cultural discourses by which she and others are excluded and oppressed: 'Whichever way you look at it there aren't many students coming out in support of the [teachers'] strike. It's like most of them don't think it'll make any difference and our futures are screwed anyway' (*ibid.*: 57). In effect, Doria's irreverent narration reveals the fractures and divisions which inhibit social progress and/or create dissonance in her life: 'laughter when it triumphed over the fear inspired by the mystery of the world and by power...boldly unveiled the truth about both. It resisted praise, flattery, hypocrisy. This laughing truth [was] expressed in curses and abusive words, degraded power' (Bakhtin, 1984: 92-93). And in the true spirit of carnival this proves to be more than purely negative satire: 'Praise and abuse are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin...The billingsgate idiom is a two-faced Janus' (*ibid.*: 165). Indeed, the novel's nuanced representations, have a dialogic quality

which undermines easy assumptions and ultimately refuses any straightforward or narrow account, a point highlighted by Brinda Mehta in her analysis of Guène's work: 'the narrator...complicates the representation of the young men of the projects by highlighting their complexity' (2010: 194). Doria's closest friend and confidante, for example, is the likeable, spliff-smoking, ex-prisoner Hamoudi: 'If Hamoudi was a bit older, I'd like it if he'd been my dad. We talked for the longest time when he found out what happened to me and my mum' (Guène, 2006: 20). In between dispensing words of wisdom, and providing a listening ear, Hamoudi, inspires and delights Doria with quotes from the poems of Arthur Rimbaud: 'when he does them for me with his accent and hand actions coming from the street, even if I don't catch all the meaning, they seem kind of beautiful to me '(*ibid*.: 20). Much maligned family friend 'Neeky Nabil, AKA that fat dumpling' (*ibid*.: 136), whose dad 'never hits him and...talks to him all the time' (*ibid*.: 127), encouraged by his mother, assists Doria with her homework and is acknowledged as 'coming in handy' (*ibid*.: 72) sometimes. Indeed, he ultimately sparks Doria's political ambition and to her surprise, becomes a valued friend and her first love.

Positive support is also acknowledged from the persistently derided welfare state: 'the novel...disrupts totalizing perspectives of French oppression' (Mehta, 2010: 191). The 'bare stupid' psychologist Mrs Burlaud, for example, who 'makes out she's got an answer for everything' (*ibid*.: 92), also happens to take Doria 'seriously, even when you're making a tower block out of purple plasticine' (*ibid*.: 41). Indeed, she ultimately enables the young protagonist to progress: 'it's thanks to all that stuff I'm doing better now' (*ibid*.: 165-166). At the same time, Doria's previously confined and disempowered mother Yasmina, 'When Dad lived with us, there was no question of her working' (*ibid*.: 104) achieves growing confidence and moves into better paid, less exploitative employment 'actually thanks to Livry-Gargan town council...[as] that Barbie doll social worker Mrs Wotsit helped mum find her dual-training course' (*ibid*.: 7). It is this programme which enables Yasmina, to broaden her social contacts and develop crucial literacy and 'job-seeking' skills (*ibid*.: 72).

Doria's carnivalized discourse, then, works against any single or monological account, 'the dialogic, heteroglot aspects of language are essentially threatening to any unitary, authoritarian and hierarchical conception of society, art and life' (Allen, 2005: 30). On the contrary, it provides complex and sometimes contrary understandings of character, culture and place. As Diane Samuels notes in her review, 'in allowing Doria to vent her resentful opinions on Muslim bigotry, French racism, general misogyny and the inadequacies of the welfare system' Guène simultaneously allows her to 'reveal the invaluable communal support and educational benefits that enable Doria and her mother to climb out of the victim rut' (2006). This is not, however, the anticipated closure that Reynolds identifies in young adult realist texts which: 'present the trajectory of adolescence as a movement from feelings of isolation/alienation accompanied by distaste for the status quo to a sense of acceptance and willingness to invest in the very social structures that gave rise to the original sense of critical detachment' (2007: 72). In Burgess's and Keplinger's novels, for example, the subversive sexual behaviour of the young protagonists is 'reined in' as they come to understand the value of responsible, emotionally committed sexual relationships. Doria does, of course, 'climb out of the victim rut'. That is, she moves towards a more self-reliant and independent way of life; she achieves a more optimistic mindset and following her mother's example, determines to press on with her college work. However, this does not represent any unquestioning endorsement or passive acceptance of mainstream values and norms. As, Doria and the reader know, this is neither a chosen nor desired career path. On the contrary, Doria has been signed up for a hairdressing course simply because there weren't 'enough places at school' (Guène, 2006: 97-98). Thus, conventional commitment to education and hard work is undermined by the implication it is unlikely to lead to any real job satisfaction or allow her to achieve her full potential in life: the 'cyborg' social worker 'started on about my career and my future in hairdressing. What did she expect? That faffing about with people's hair was my big passion in life?...she hasn't clicked that I didn't actually have an alternative' (*ibid*.: 130).

Alongside the young protagonist's growing optimism, then, runs a counter acknowledgement of continuing discontent: 'What else could I ask for? You thought I was going to say nothing? Well think again, because there's bare stuff I still haven't got. Loads of things need changing round here' (*ibid*.: 178). In a break with development narratives, and indeed, traditional literature of the *banlieues*, she dreams of achieving this through ongoing resistance and political reform.

> Why not go into politics? '*From highlights to high office: it's closer than you think...*' I'll have to think up some more along those lines...You know, the kind of quotes you read in history books at school...It'll be a smart revolution with nobody getting hurt...We'll be like the poet Rimbaud, fired up by 'the sobbing of the Oppressed, the clamour of the Cursed' (*ibid*.: 178-179).

In his study of post-Beur fiction, for instance, Dominic Thomas notes that this denouement marks a significant departure 'vis-a-vis *Beur* writing...whereby the narrative is organized around the central protagonist's attempts to "get out" from the housing project' (2008: 43). In effect, Doria does not simply 'escape' or 'move on' from disrupted rebellious adolescence to 'settled' adulthood and passive acceptance of the status quo, any more than she escapes *banlieue* culture to assimilate into any homogenous national ideal. On the contrary, she seeks a new kind of socio-cultural identity, a more dynamic and inclusive identity quite literally represented in the structure and language of the text. Jason Burke in his assessment notes this hybrid mix: 'The French title of the book, *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, is an almost untranslatable mixture of appropriated Arabic and "pure" French. Such linguistic and cultural juxtapositions litter the book's text, as they litter the language of most young people in Paris' (2006).

As in Haddon's narrative, then, the centrifugal forces of carnival disrupt generic/literary conventions and privilege the subordinate voice. In his review of the novel Tucker observes, Guène's 'teenage heroine...speaks up for a new generation and previously unheard cast of dispossessed characters' (2006). In the young writer's account, as in the older author's work, this results in an interrogative intertextual discourse which refuses monologic understandings of

culture which are: ‘deaf to voices of difference’ (Robinson, 2011a) as well as undermining limiting or essentialist categorizations of age and reading audience. Doria, the ‘typically’ angst-ridden, disgruntled and sometimes naïve teenage narrator, at the same time, has a streetwise knowing and socio-cultural awareness often denied in more conventional coming of age accounts. In effect, her understanding frequently equals and often exceeds that of adults in the text and potentially, many of the novel’s readers too: this ‘is a world more often written up by journalists after the latest riots rather than by [teenage] authors who have lived there all their lives, this is literature that needs to be read’ (Tucker, 2006). Guène’s close-up view, then, offers a complex, alternative perspective of contentious contemporary socio-political issues and makes them entertaining and accessible to a wide range of readers through the comically irreverent and astute observations of her (un)typical teenage narrator’s voice: ‘a hit with grannies from the provinces and young people on the estates alike’ (Burke, 2006). As Burke (2006) goes on to note: ‘*Just Like Tomorrow’s* mix of humour, optimism, emotion, social observation and vicious political commentary lies behind its success...reality is leavened with wonderful moments of black comedy’. I would argue, then, that Haddon’s and Guène’s less obviously ‘shocking’ exploration of alternative teenage realities have a broad scope and dialogic complexity which the ostensibly subversive, single theme realist romance/first-sex novels do not. As a consequence, they can be said to offer a sophisticated and challenging, rather than reassuringly nostalgic, ‘crossover’ appeal.

Conclusion

As noted in the Introduction, the huge popularity of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels and Philip Pullman's challenging, 'literary' trilogy *His Dark Materials* resulted in changes to the way literature for children/young adults is perceived and marketed in the West: 'Children's literature is not only receiving new recognition, it is being enthusiastically embraced by adult readers, adult writers, literary critics, publishers and the media' (Beckett, 2009: 252). From this increased profile and status emerged the distinct publishing category 'crossover' fiction. Linking this trend to previous 'golden ages' in children's literature, S.F. Said (2003) points to the long established readership potential of 'ageless myth'. For Said, Philip Pullman (2001) Richard Poole (2001) and others the 'vivid bold story telling...profundity and scope' (Said, 2003) of such work has an appeal not available in many 'literary' adult texts:

> And here is where Pullman scores heavily over many writers of adult literary fictions. Less damaging...than postmodernist tricksiness...is the emotional inhibition which literary sophistication sometimes brings with it. Postmodern fictionists value irony and a brilliant surface above the creation of overt emotional resonances which can catch readers up and make them exclaim (Poole, 2001: 17).

However, in contrast to Said's (2003) earlier 'golden ages' the contemporary crossovers are noted for contextually radical resistance to conventions, and innovations in style and form:

> Fiction for young readers...has grown tougher and bolder...breaking taboos and pushing boundaries with a courage and confidence it never had before. Setting the tone the Potter sequence itself has darkened appreciably with each volume, as the playtime fun has faded and motifs of loss, depression and death have moved in from the shadows (Tonkins, 2005: 14).

Liberated from the strictures of traditional frameworks these stories, disrupt expectations of content and structure and, to a greater or lesser degree, challenge the stereotypes of conventional genre. Pullman's sexually precocious young

female hero Lyra, for instance, is a 'new Eve' who redeems humankind, whilst Isamu Fukui's multi-cultural, male *and* female action protagonists gain authority, status and/or liberation through ferociously violent action and lethal fighting skills. This 'freedom from the familiar' has the potential to empower and challenge the reader in new ways and 'expand the horizons' (Smith, 2007: 49) of those who may be more confirmed or fixed in their reading tastes. Pullman's complex address of global religious, environmental issues and dense intertextual illusions, for example, raises *His Dark Materials* above the limiting categorisation 'young adult fantasy' text.

Whilst there is a noted 'tendency to equate crossover with the fantasy' modes, however, my analysis confirms Beckett's observation that 'in fact, almost every genre can cross between child and adult audiences' (2009: 5). As demonstrated in Chapter Five, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (2003), with its narratorial digressions and innovative format, like Faïza Guène's socio-cultural critique, *Just Like Tomorrow* (2004/2006), prove that radical and challenging fiction with plausible plot and characters can attract a broad readership too. These stories may lack the sweeping scope and robust narrative drive associated with fantasy modes, but nevertheless have a compelling sense of immediacy and relevance that 'other worlds' scenarios can lack. The employment of the mythic and mystical in David Almond's hybrid fantasy realism, for instance, undeniably allows the address of life's 'big themes' and provides a sense of the spiritual not easily achieved in more conventional realist modes: 'Almond...takes the reader into the unnamed boundary between those states of being and brings a greater understanding to that which defies definition, but which is nonetheless part of the human state for adult and child' (Webb, 2006: 242). On the other hand, I have argued that the positioning of his characters in a plausibly real environment gives his representations of violence, death, cruelty, conflict and so on, an impact denied by the reassuring remoteness of distanced fantastical or dystopian worlds. In effect, it removes 'the little invisibly ring of safety' Haddon (in Beckett, 2009: 260-261) identifies as characteristic of conventional

children's/young adults' fictions. I would suggest that in *Clay* (2005), this leads to a more fundamental blurring of borders between children's and adults' texts than achieved in Pullman's and Ness's fantasy works.

This study confirms, then, that genre and genre experiment can present different opportunities in terms of radical 'crossover' appeal. At the same time, consideration of patterns and innovations of category serves to highlight the socio-cultural forces driving changes in the field, and most significantly for this analysis, the role played by children and young adults in these shifting trends. As Alison Waller points out: 'Genre is inherently social and historical as well as aesthetic, and the process of any particular genre being recognised, organised and allowed to flourish owes much to ideological climates and dominant discourses' (2009: 12). In Chapter Three, for instance, I considered how the recognition of new media, with 'their special relevance to teenage culture' (*ibid*.: 7), was manifested in the increasingly graphic representations of violence and brutality in the emerging young adult dystopian action genre, whilst in Chapter Five I indicated that, until recently, this recognition, has not been similarly reflected in representations of teenage romance: 'It is common for scenes of violence to make their way into young adult books and even younger, yet [explicit, consequence free] sex remains a taboo' (Byrne in Charlieinabook, 2013).

The recent rise of the 'New Adult' (hereafter NA) or 'Steamies' genre, such as that shrewdly anticipated in Melvin Burgess's *Doing It* (2003) and realised in Kody Keplinger's *The Duff* (2010/2012), is described by children's literature lecturer Lucy Pearson as a cynical attempt by publishers to enhance the noted nostalgic appeal of first love/first-sex for the 'older audience...less likely to be satisfied by the omission of detail regarding sex' (in Vincent, 2013). Burgess (2004), by contrast, has long argued that the address of explicit sexuality, in fact, is a necessary acknowledgement of the realities of 'adolescent' understandings and experience in the modern world. Perhaps inevitably, those now writing and publishing sexually explicit NA romances make much of this point. At 'The London Book Fair' of 2013, 'Steamies' authors Abbi Glines, Liz Bankes and

others complained of publishers' tardiness in responding to a genre already established in television, as well as in films and in reading material online: 'Publishers should be aware that writers are honing their skills with pre-existing fan networks and gatekeepers should be aware that teens are capable of seeing more "shocking" content online than in their book shops' (Bankes in Charlieinabook, 2013).

Whilst we might expect these authors to emphasize the 'need' and 'market' for their work, there is much evidence to support their claims. Publishers, of course, will be hoping to 'cash in' on 'the millions of older readers who have flocked to the young adult category' (Kaufman, 2013), but it is difficult to deny that the sexually explicit content in NA novels caters to the 'maturing tastes' of children and adolescents too. As noted in Chapter Five, the demand 'for more realistic romances that reflect their own emerging sex lives' (Carlyle, 2013) is being expressed by the young themselves. Adolescent author Beth Reekles, for instance, wrote her 'steamy' teenage romance novel *The Kissing Booth* (2013) partly because she was tired of implausible story lines full of wizards and vampires: 'All I want is a believable plot with characters people my age can identify with' (Reekles in bbc.co.uk, 2013). Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006) flag up the role of the internet in enabling young readers to articulate and realise these readership demands. In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, they highlight the unprecedented opportunities contemporary websites now offer 'ever younger' (2006: 13) fans to actively discuss, write and promote critical and creative responses to favoured texts. Kimberley Reynolds in her analysis of radical children's fiction makes a similar point: 'the situation is changing...a great deal of writing by children is [now] finding an audience via the Internet' (2007: 180). Certainly, this was the case for Reekles whose *The Kissing Booth* was initially self-published online. Like Hellekson and Busse (2006), Reynolds (2007) and others note the radically challenging and often graphic nature of many of the works produced, not least, in representations of teenage romance and sex: '[it is] perhaps unsurprising that a generation that has grown up with online pornography [and] web cams that allow them to send intimate pictures

of themselves' seem uninhibited when it comes to 'producing sexually graphic material and posting it...for the world to read' (*ibid*.: 182). Young adults, then, are not simply 'seeing' or consuming 'shocking' stories 'online' (Bankes, 2013), but actually producing and promoting their own. In her overview of the NA genre, digital media reporter Leslie Kaufman confirms this trend: '[as] publishers hesitated, a crop of young authors began forcing the issue...[by] self-publishing novels on the Internet...Online readers made them best sellers by word of mouth' (Kaufman, 2012).

Whilst by no means a sole driver of change, then, new technologies and a multi-media environment have and continue to have a significant impact on shaping understandings, and influencing literary production, structure, content and forms, a factor Melanie Koss and William Teale confirm in their analysis of trends in the field:

> ...technology is bringing [changes] to forms of print text. These changes have interesting connections to the range of writing styles currently found in YA literature. It appears that more authors are taking risks, experimenting with their writing by playing with new forms of voice and structure...The reading of texts written using multiple narrative perspectives can offer challenges to teen readers and parallel the piecing together of information that is becoming common in their everyday lives (2009: 570).

Echoing Jack Zipes' (2007) concerns, they stress the importance of teaching 'young people' how to make sense of the diverse and often uncensored material and 'multiple perspectives' to which they are now exposed. Educators are urged to prompt young students to question 'all the available information, judge what is accurate and what is biased, and be selective in the information they accept' (Koss & Teale, 2009: 570), a didactic impulse noted in my analysis of Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* (2008-2010) trilogy. His textually innovative imagination of 'Noise', a confusing babble of voices, ideas, images and so on, carries a caution against the intrusive and potentially damaging effects of all pervasive new media whilst offering moral guidelines for ways to understand and cope. However, whilst Koss and Teale (2009), J.J. Klinker (1999) and others highlight the difficulties and challenges young readers face, Sandra Beckett (2009) and Michael

Cart (2010) suggest those who have grown up in the new media environment may be as able, if not better equipped, than adults at reading in 'multiple contexts across diverse media' (Cart, 2010: 194).

Indeed, evidence of this perceptive reading has been identified in my analysis of the selected young adult authors' works. Helen Oyeyemi (2005), Keplinger (2010) and Guène (2006), for example, overtly reference the diverse and contrary discourses which shape and influence their protagonists' understandings and rather than suggest passive acceptance, express ironic acknowledgement of the 'world that media tries to sell' (Klinker in Koss & Teale, 2009: 570). Guène's young protagonist, for instance, repeatedly remarks on the gap between her lived experience and the often laughingly misleading representations in books, films and news and entertainment narratives on television and so on:

> I often picture myself as part of the Ingalls family in *Little House on the Prairie*.
>
> It goes like this: the dad, the mum, the kids, the dog that doesn't bite, the barn and ribbons in your hair for church on Sundays. We're talking happiness, you get me...What I like about them is, as soon as something goes wrong, they make the sign of the cross, have a good cry, and everybody's forgotten about it by the next episode...Just like the movies.
>
> It's embarrassing because I reckon the characters in that series dress better than me. Even though they live in this tiny arse-end-of nowhere village and their dad's a fat farmer' (2006: 65-66).

Family life for the Ingalls is imagined as a cohesive and 'happy' one in which the 'dog...never bites', the girls wear pretty ribbons and family disputes are easily resolved. However, Doria's cynical observation that the characters 'dress better' than she, even though they, too, live in an isolated 'settlers'' community 'in the...arse-end-of nowhere', ironically aligns their world to her own more troubled and unsettled one. The ongoing tension and 'embarrassing' poverty of Doria's migrant experience, thus, sets up a questioning of the media's positive account.

Alongside this awareness of the 'media sell', I have highlighted the employment of media influenced strategies expressing subversive opposition in the young authors' fictional works. Fukui's *Truancy* trilogy (2008-2012), for example, is a

dizzying mix of action-packed scene shifts, constantly altering perspectives, alliances and timeframes, which in common with Catherine Banner's fragmented and piecemeal fantasy *The Eyes of a King* (2008), breaks free from literary containment and authoritarian control. In contrast to Ness's and Pullman's meticulously structured tales, these young authors' carnivalized narratives express a subversive ambivalence and irresolution which allow differing and opposing subject positions to be taken up. From a 'literary' perspective, of course, this may be interpreted as the unintended product of their inexperience and less developed writing and editing skills. Stephanie Morrill, creator of the website 'Go Teen Writers' (goteenwriters.blogspot.co.uk), for instance, notes that 'teenagers...don't see much risk in putting their early, unpolished work out there for the world to see' (in Stevens, 2014).

Whilst it is certainly true that the adolescent authored fantasies in this study lack the intellectual sophistication and stylistic fluency of Pullman's and Ness's more 'polished' works, I would argue the noted lack of inhibition and willingness to take risks, result in a challenge to traditional forms and expectations which is not simply the inadvertent consequence of literary naïvety and/or unpractised writing skills. Nicholas Kulish's (2010) summation of the controversy following the publication of Helene Hegemann's novel *Axolotl Roadkill* (2010), a bricolage of diverse, unreferenced sources, is perhaps significant in this respect. In his role as foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, Kulish, reporting on the 'plagiarism' storm emerging after the publication of the young German author's work, describes it as: 'a collision...between the staid, literary establishment...and the Berlin youth culture of D.J.'s and artists that sample freely and thereby breathe creativity into old forms' (2010). Countering the outraged response of critics 'significantly older' than the seventeen year old author herself, lecturer T. Mills Kelly (2011) makes a similar point. In his journal article 'Teaching History in a Remix Culture', he identifies *Axolotl Roadkill* as a creative and imaginative work, reflecting the rising generation's 'new way of thinking' (2011: 373) and fresh approach. Banner's and Fukui's writing like Hegemann's, then, may be better understood from the perspective of a youth culture which uninhibitedly and

unapologetically ‘mixes and matches from the whirring flood of information across new and old media, to create something new’ (Kulish, 2010). In effect, they employ a valid, subversively challenging ‘modern type of writing’ (Pelman in Stevens, 2014) in sync with the fractured, dialogic and ever-shifting multi-media age.

Far from being dangerously disempowered and necessarily more susceptible than adults, as Koss and Teale (2009) suggest, media literate children and adolescents can be viewed as making use of new technologies to bypass adult gatekeepers, achieve artistic agency and effectively make their voices heard, ‘the playing field has been levelled’ (Beckett, 2009: 260). Generically innovative and radically challenging fiction written about imagined real or fantasy young adult worlds, then, emerges from a complex socio-cultural dialogue, in which children and young adults play an increasingly active, *and* influential role. In this rapidly shifting socio-cultural environment deciding which audience to target with any given book has inevitably become a less certain affair ‘driven as much by personal taste and commercial considerations as by any clear-cut rules about content or quality of the writing’ (Corbett, 2005). As numerous recent examples show ‘one publisher’s YA book could be another’s adult novel’ (*ibid*.). Oyeyemi’s *The Icarus Girl*, for instance, was reviewed by many critics as a young adult novel, despite being marketed in the ‘adult’ category. The *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, by contrast, was intended for an adult audience by the author himself, but simultaneously published in two imprints as both children’s and adults’ text (Ciocia, 2009).

Broad audience appeal, then, can arise through a variety of narrative genres, forms and writing styles and regardless of authorial age. Nevertheless, I have pointed up characteristic differences in ‘perspective’ which mark off adults’ from adolescent authors’ works. In effect, alongside the radical and/or interrogative content, in adult authored fictions, I have identified a responsible and distanced perspective which simultaneously works to limit and restrict understandings in representations of identity and development in a way the less ‘self-censored’ perceptions of young

authors do not. Barbara Wall points to this distinction in her analysis of children's literature: 'adults whether or not they are speaking ironically, speak differently in fiction when they are aware that they are addressing children' (Wall, 1991: 2). So, although all of the texts analysed in this study effectively resist idealised notions of childhood and asexual innocence in the sense that Jacqueline Rose (1984) suggests, traces of nostalgia and/or reassuring 'difference' nonetheless prevail in adult authored accounts. This observation is perhaps unwittingly confirmed in Boyd Tonkin's assessment of the crossover phenomenon:

> [this trend] is not the sign of a culture full of jaded Peter Pans, eager to blot out the heartache of post-adolescent life in an orgy of infantile regression...Rather, it's a matter of adult readers (and adult authors) recovering within themselves the special intensity and special focus, of the pre-adolescent vision. The aim is not to resurrect a vanished "innocence," but to enrich a fragmented present with a shared past. Every reader in the world, after all, either has been -or remains- a child, with access at some level to the child's capacity for rapture, terror, boredom and excitement. This is perhaps the only sort of universality that literature can claim (2002).

That is, whilst recognising the increasing sophistication or 'adultization' (Beckett, 2009: 258) of today's youth, and to a greater or lesser degree providing more complex understandings, all but one of the adult writers in this study continue to perceive childhood and adolescence as either fundamentally innocent and/or as 'special' and temporary states from which the young emerge - generally through humanist development and/or learned self-control. Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is, of course, the noted exception here, as this novel's young protagonist, Christopher, in fact, changes 'very little as a result of his experiences' (Walsh, 2007: 116). Whilst the author's intended 'adult' readership is not insignificant in this respect, it is also worth noting that Christopher's journey *is* traditionally linear and because ultimately compromised by his implied 'Asperger's condition, does not directly challenge narratives of 'age'. Christopher's 'atypical' emotional/intellectual status thus to some extent side-steps issues of representation I have emphasized in the other accounts. This is, in effect, what Waller observes, as the adult author's struggle to generate 'narratives that explore the realm of adolescence without recourse to the teleology of development and adulthood' (2009: 196).

The gritty 'realism' in Burgess' *Doing It*, for instance, expresses a subversively graphic acknowledgement of adolescent sexuality whilst, at the same time, positioning its young characters, and implied young adult readers as being 'childishly' naïve. Burgess' comically inept young male protagonists must learn the value and pleasure of responsible, committed sex before they 'move on' to reassuringly separate adulthood: 'Comically toe-curling scenes...will make...adult readers glad to be grown-up' (Spring, 2003). Pullman's and Ness's complex mixed-fantasies series, of course, do not seek to 'fix' the child in the way I suggest that Burgess' novel does; nevertheless, radical representations of young adult sexuality and/or brutality are here, too, tempered and morally contained through didactic deployment of the romantic/heroic quest. And even Almond's disconcertingly ambivalent novel *Clay* continues to mark distinctions between good/evil, past/present, young/old and so on. Dark and sinister childhood is acknowledged but, nonetheless, set within the context of a simpler and more socially/morally cohesive, if not unified, past.

Movement to adult life, in the adolescent authored fictions, by contrast is an altogether more ambivalent process, generally imagined as a consequence of time and circumstance, rather than any linear progression or symbolically significant transition from one distinct state to the next. In Oyeyemi's disorientating and uncertain narrative, the protagonist's 'journey' is not a specifically ethical encounter with 'other', and in contrast to *Clay*, gives no reassurance that control of self or identity balance can be achieved. On the contrary, Jess's transition raises tensions which appear impossible to resolve. Banner's novels similarly compromise notions of progression through carnivalization of heroic action and deconstruction of romance narratives and ideals of redemptive first love. As in *The Icarus Girl*, unsettled and disturbed childhood and adolescence, in *The Eyes of a King* is not positively reformed or effectively overcome. In adulthood, her protagonist Leo continues to struggle with debilitating bouts of depression and ongoing feelings of guilt and grief. This irresolution, of course, may be interpreted

as an inevitable consequence of authorial age: not having become 'adults' it might be argued that the teenage authors are less likely to have the knowledge, insight or indeed distance needed to represent transition away from 'youth'.

I would argue, however, their less inhibited and less didactically driven near-perspective, facilitated by a culture where 'notions of privacy are ever-loosening' (Pelman in Stevens, 2014), results in unsentimental understandings of childhood/young adulthood which unavoidably interrogate modern demarcations of age. In Fukui's texts, for instance, extreme youthful violence is not heroically justified or balanced by 'fundamental' goodness, nor seen as the consequence of the young protagonist's susceptibility to corrupt *adult* manipulation, as implied in Pullman's and Ness's texts. On the contrary in *Truancy*, children and adolescents themselves foment, lead and sustain social revolution through violent action and to the end embrace it as a potentially liberating force. In this world there is often little distinction between child/teenage rebels and ferocious adult oppressors other than their 'cause'. Keplinger's characters, on the other hand, are sexually knowing and competent and participate in pleasurable, 'irresponsible' sex. Her narrator's ultimate conformity, is not the result of an ethical awakening, but an interrogative and self-aware moulding of identity in response to socio-cultural pressures to conform:

> *What should I wear*? and *How should I fix my hair*? All the stuff I'd never worried about before. Talk about surreal.
>
> But those were the things Casey and Jessica were experts on, so they came home with me...and they were eager to make me look like a Barbie doll. If I hadn't been so nervous about my date, I would have been horrified, my feminist sensibilities offended at their preening and squealing...They spent the rest of the time using a flatiron on my unwilling hair. It took them two hours – that's no exaggeration – to get it all straight.
>
> 'See, B,' Casey said. 'All of that Duff shit is ridiculous. You look freaking smoking right now' (Keplinger, 2012: 252).

Indeed, Bianca's commentary here challenges and compromises popular romance's empowering transition myth. The heroine's disdainful reference to 'Barbie' and her 'preening and squealing' friends, foregrounds the foolishness and, for her, limiting superficiality of this constructed sexiness. This is confirmed

when she actually goes on her date: 'my bare legs were freezing (they hadn't let me wear panty hose), and the thin material of my blouse definitely didn't shield me from the wind' (*ibid*.: 259). Far from being reassured, as she hopes, Bianca feels physically and psychologically compromised by the imposition of 'Barbie doll' conformity: 'watch me end up like that girl in *The Devil Wears Prada*…A complete loser working at some stupid fashion magazine when all I really want to do is write about world events' (*ibid*.: 258).

Adolescent authors, then, endow their young protagonists with a knowingness, and/or an intellectual/emotional capital not granted in the adult authored works. Socio-cultural differences are acknowledged and expressed by these young writers, but characteristics and/or qualities are not recognised as specific to 'age': Guène's young protagonist Doria is more streetwise and worldly than her good natured and naïve mother; Oyeyemi's character Jess has an advanced intelligence and 'adult' literary tastes and so on. Childhood/young adulthood as understood in these texts is thus not reassuringly 'separate' or 'special', and offers little potential to 'enrich a fragmented present' with some imagined 'universal' or 'shared past' (Tonkin, 2002). On the contrary their works have a sense of immediacy which suggests the dynamic and discordant nature of experience in the here and now, of precocious youth lived in an ever-shifting, heavily inter-mediated post-millennial age. If life is to be viewed as a process of shaping and becoming, their novels confronts us with the understanding that it is an *unfinished* and shifting, rather than *finalizable* process and that straightforward progression from one state to the next is a socially constructed ideal. This recognition inevitably has implications in terms of audience address and crossover status. Grounded in assumptions of difference, adult authored texts offer broad appeal through a conscious 'dual', or in Burgess's case, ambivalent 'double' address. The younger authors' understandings of mutable states/cultures, on the other hand, generate radical ambivalencies which make their novels difficult to place in terms of genre and/or specific category of addressee. In effect, rather than bridging assumed divisions

between childhood/adulthood and different age category texts, teenage authors in their approach and close-up perspectives effect a distinct form of hybridity which is disinclined to recognise boundaries themselves.

This investigation, then, indicates that young adult readers and authors are having a significant impact on trends and changes in a currently dynamic and exciting contemporary literary scene. Despite an increasing recognition of 'young people's' input, however, I have found that there is still generally very little critical recognition of the fiction young writers produce; with the exception of Beckett's (2009) excellent overview, there is, on the whole, no serious or extensive consideration of what this body of writing contributes to the crossover phenomenon *per se*. Indeed, there continues to be a tendency amongst *adult* critics and reviewers to patronise, dismiss and/or take for granted adolescent authors' fiction as being inevitably formulaic and/or unchallenging and lightweight. Commenting on the critical success of Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, for instance, Randy Dotinga, President of the American Society of Journalists and Authors, observes that: 'some adults struggle to understand…how one so young can manage to write with authority in an original voice' (2005). The increasing recognition and commercial success being experienced by today's young writers is, at the same time, put down to publishers' eagerness to give '[teens] stuff that they want, that's being produced by their peers' (Harper in Dotinga, 2005). It is, of course, true that less polished and derivative or unimaginative writing is produced by 'new' authors, although not exclusively the 'young'. However, this study has shown that young writers' less inhibited writing strategies and/or less self-conscious address of familiar young adult themes: love, romance, death, grief, single-parenthood and so on, may also produce radically challenging and polyphonic understandings which are far from 'unoriginal' and certainly more complex and significant than the limiting descriptor 'teen stuff' would imply. Indeed, my identification of a fresh approach and/or near-perspectives points to a potential to create new types of hybrid fiction which goes beyond the much hailed troubling of adult/child boundaries frequently acclaimed in adult authored crossover texts. Teenage writers, thus, may be seen as not only *contributing* to the

vibrant crossover market but, in some cases, actually breaking new ground. The fresh insights this study contributes, then, demonstrate that any comprehensive account of shifts and trends in the current literary scene would benefit from broader and altogether more considered critical review of young adults' input than has been offered to-date.

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